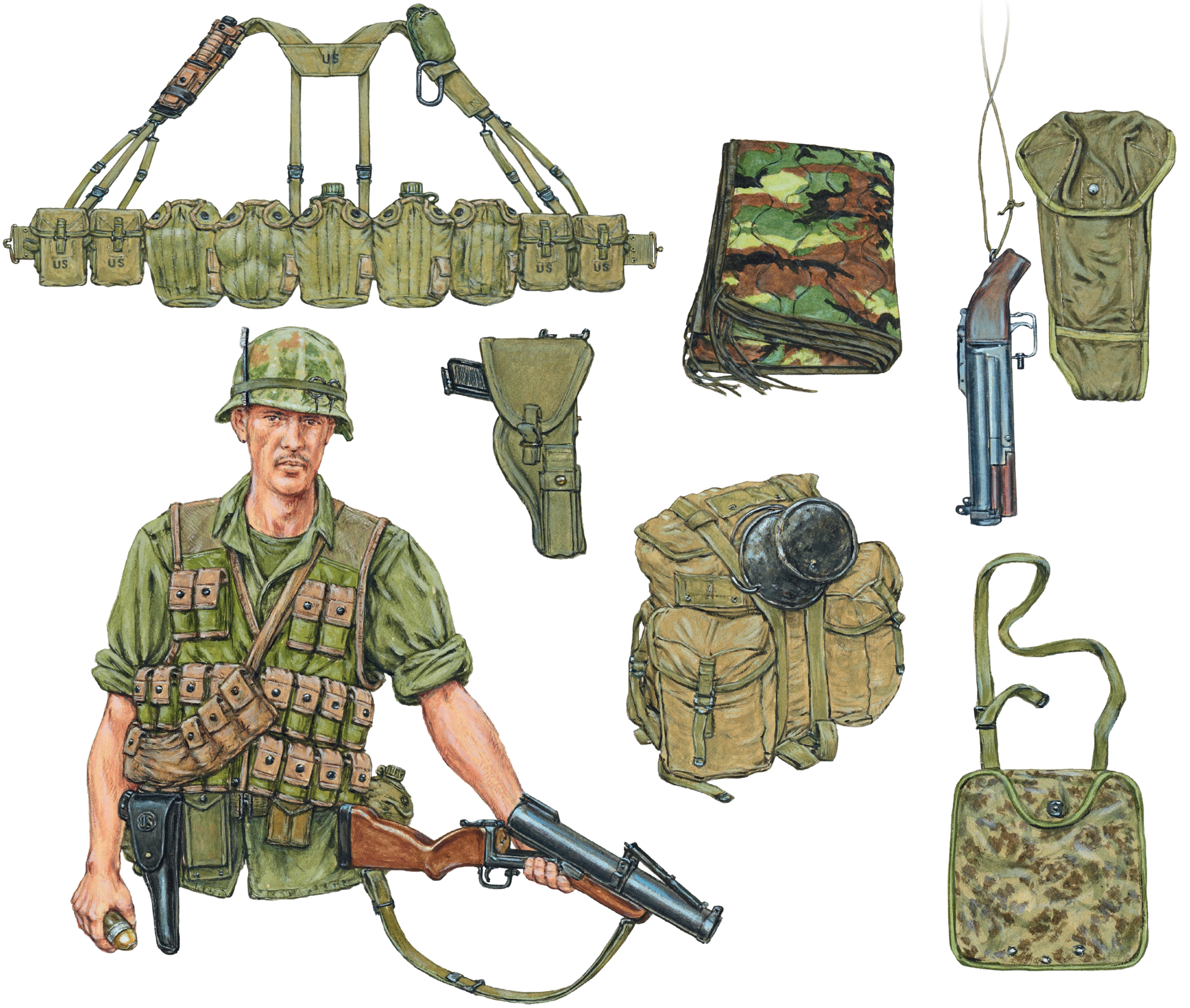
Vietnam War US & Allied Combat Equipments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GORDON L. ROTTMAN

ILLUSTRATED BY ADAM HOOK

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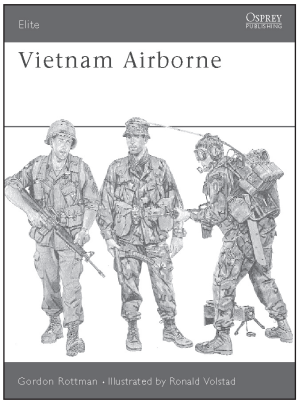
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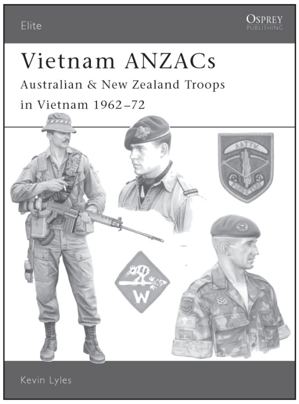
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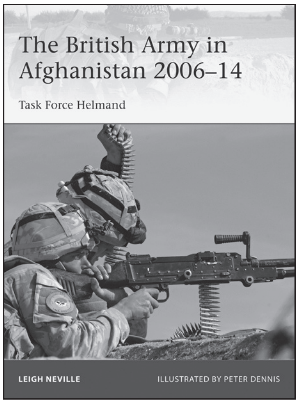
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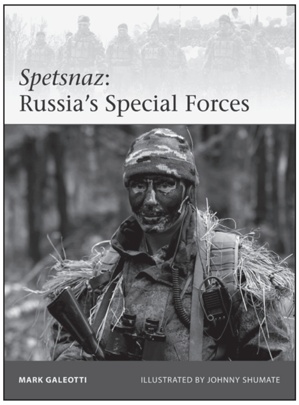
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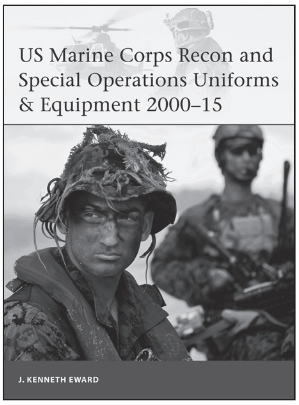
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Vietnam War US & Allied Combat Equipments

GORDON L. ROTTMAN

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TITLE PAGE PHOTO "Grunts" awaiting orders to board helicopters. Both Army M1956 ammo pouches, and Marine M1961 pouches for M14 rifle magazines, are visible. In addition to the normal web gear, note the three-pocket grenade carrier tied to the right leg (top left), and a 60mm mortar-round packing tube (right foreground) on top of the pack. (US Marine Corps History Division)

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Abbreviations used in this text:

A/G	air-to-ground
ALICE	Advanced Lightweight Load-Carrying Equipment (pronounced "Alice")
AN/	Army-Navy/(designation system)
AN/PRC-	portable radio communications (man-portable radio)
ANZACs	Australian & New Zealand troops (pronounced "ann-zaks")
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam (pronounced "ar-vin")
BAR	Browning automatic rifle M1918A2 (pronounced "B-A-R," never "bar")
CIDG	Civilian Irregular Defense Group (pronounced "sidge")
CISO	Counterinsurgency Support Office
DD	Department of Defence (Australian)
ERDL	Engineer Research & Development Laboratories (camouflage pattern)
FSN	Federal Stock Number (applied 1949–75)
ILCE	Individual Load-Carrying Equipment (M1956)
indig	indigenous (equipment used by CIDG/SOG – pronounced "indidge")
JG	jungle green color (ANZAC)
KW	Korean War (1950–53)
LAW	light antitank weapon (M72 rocket launcher – pronounced "law")
LBE/LCE	load-bearing/carrying equipment (general terms)
LRRP	long-range reconnaissance patrol (pronounced "lurp")
LTD	lift-the-dot fastener
MACV-SOG	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam-Studies and Observation Group (pronounced "Mac-Vee-Sog")
MG	machine gun
MIKE Force	Mobile Strike Force
MLCE	Modernized Load-Carrying Equipment (M1967)
NSN	National Stock Number (implemented 1975)
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
OD	olive drab color
OG	olive green color
P'	Pattern date (ANZAC)
QM	Quartermaster
rd/rds	round/rounds (single cartridge/s)
RF/PF	Regional Force & Popular Force ("Ruff-Puffs" – RVN regional militias)
ROK	Republic of Korea (South Korea – pronounced "rock")
RVN	Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam)
SMG	submachine gun
USMC	United States Marine Corps
USSF	United States Army Special Forces
VC	Viet Cong
WE	web equipment (ANZAC term)
WP	white phosphorous (casualty-producing & screening smoke)

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VIETNAM WAR US & ALLIED COMBAT EQUIPMENTS

INTRODUCTION

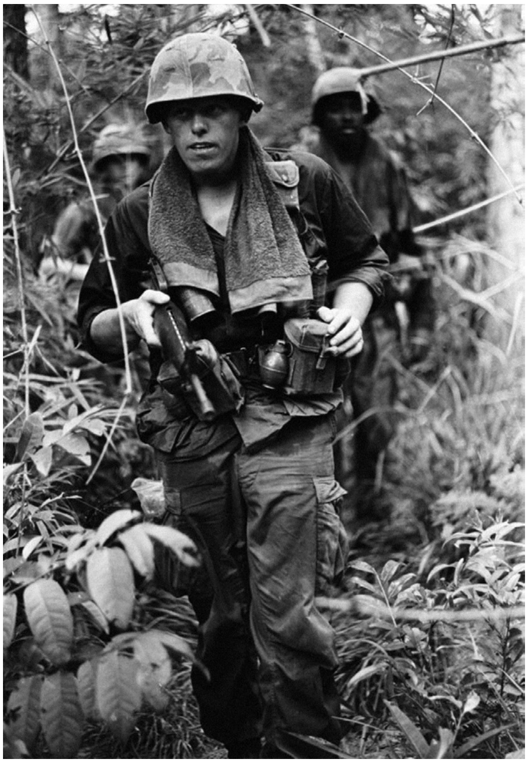
> "Off ya' butts and on ya' feet. Outta the shade and into the sun. Saddle up, grunts."
>
> *(Any infantry NCO)*

grunt ('grənt') *n*. An infantryman in Vietnam, so named owing to rendering a low grunt when struggling to his feet under a full rucksack. Derived too from "grunt work" – menial, rigorous physical labor.

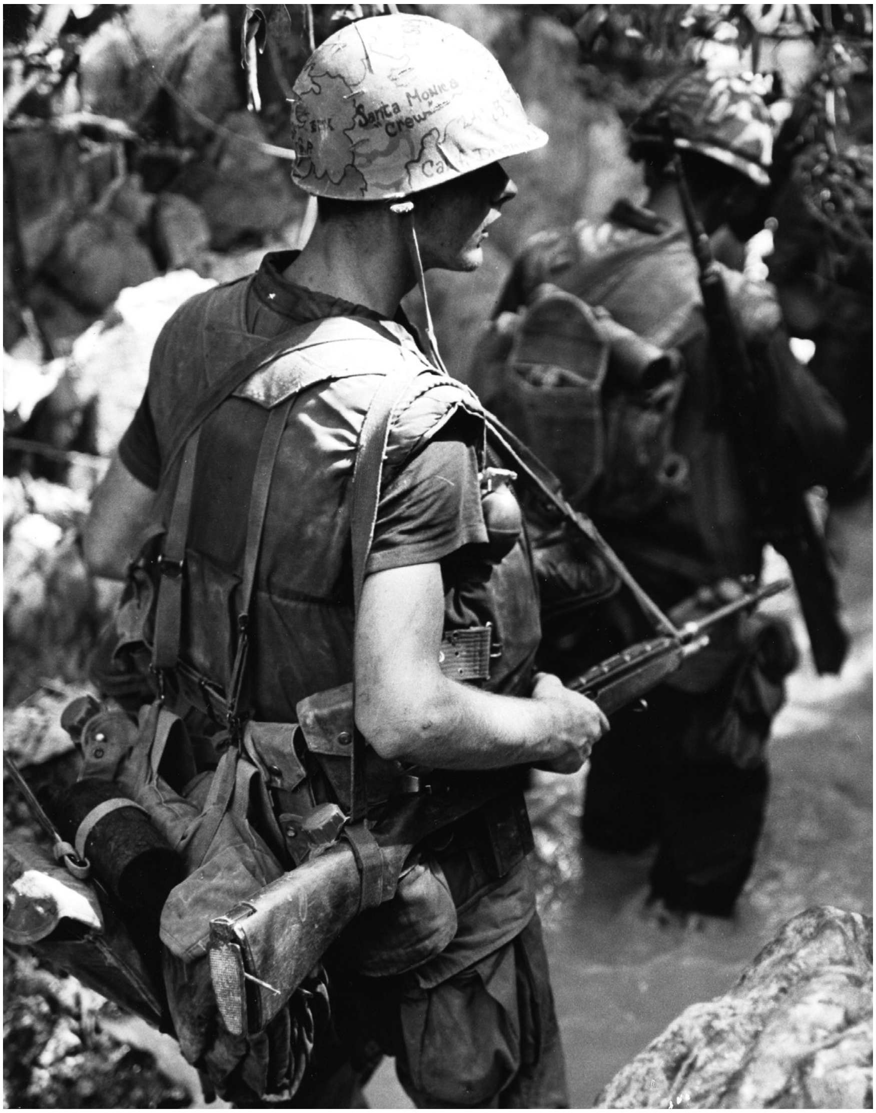
Since World War I soldiers have required a basic minimum of field equipment, consisting of a load of ammunition, a bayonet, intrenching tool, water canteen, mess gear, field dressing, washing kit, gasmask, a day's rations, and simple shelter (bedroll, sleeping bag, poncho, etc.) – and the means to carry it all. Equipment designs and materials have evolved, and an ever-increasing range of new items have been required to accommodate new weapons, but the soldier's customary necessities remain constant.

There have long been operations requiring soldiers to conduct missions independently of their parent unit and without routine logistics support for extended periods. The advent of the man-portable radio in World War II (WW II) expanded the opportunities for long-duration independent missions. Examples in WW II included the British Chindits and the US Merrill's Marauders operating behind Japanese lines in Burma, but even they required air-resupply every two to four days; rations for six days is about the maximum that soldiers can carry.

America and Australia have long conducted small-scale special operations and larger conventional operations in tropical environments. However, the Vietnam War saw entire divisions operating over large areas for prolonged periods, and was lengthy enough that equipment better suited for the



A soldier armed with an M16A1 rifle slogs through the brush; note the M26 "frags" attached to the sides of his M1956 universal "ammo pouches," and M18 colored smoke grenades hanging from his suspenders, just visible below the terry-cloth bath towel that he uses as a "drive-on rag." (US Army)



Member of a 3rd Marine Division patrol during Operation "Beacon Hill" early in 1967, just before the Marines received M16A1 rifles. The use of Army gear increased through the war; this marine has M1956 suspenders and equipment belt, along with M1961 pouches for his M14 rifle magazines. A makeshift bedroll is attached to the back of the suspenders and belt, along with an "e-tool carrier," and a smoke-grenade packing tube (used to keep personal items dry and clean). An M26 hand grenade is hung on a web loop on his M1955 "flak vest." (US Marine Corps History Division)

environment and mission could be developed and fielded. In all the war lasted from 1 November 1955 to 30 April 1975, with US and Australian ground combat involvement from 1965 to 1972. Much research, development, and production effort went into combat equipments, with literally millions of sets being used in-country. The study of equipment used in Vietnam is demanding, since multiple generations of gear – some dating from as long ago as 1910 – were intermixed; equipment was also modified by the troops, and used for purposes other than what designers had imagined.

Vietnam is a land of extremes of terrain and climate, brutal to men and equipment. It is not all dense jungle, although that is the prevalent vegetation. In the North are rugged mountains cut by gorges and winding valleys; here conditions can be cool and damp at night, hot during the day, and fog and rain are common. The Central Highlands have open plateaus and rolling hills, descending into vast double- and triple-canopy forests. The coastal areas can be either hilly or flat, with varied vegetation. The extreme South is dominated by the huge Mekong Delta, flat and largely open, but with some forests and bamboo-covered areas; it is laced with rivers, streams, and intricate canal systems. Within a couple of hours a patrol could traverse forested hills, dense underbrush, muddy rice paddies, and rolling ground choked with bamboo, and had to wade several streams.

The climate is commonly hot and very humid. The dry or northeast monsoon season from November to April sees high temperatures and dusty conditions. The wet or southwest monsoon season from May to October brings heavy rains with accompanying flooding, and slightly milder temperatures. For troops operating in-country common maladies were heat exhaustion, malaria, dengue fever, dysentery, diarrhea, and "undiagnosed fevers."

* * *

This book focuses on US Army combat equipments, along with items particular to the US Marine Corps – though marines also used Army gear. The allied component includes Australian and New Zealand (ANZAC) web equipment.[1] The Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), various paramilitary forces, and other Free World forces mainly used US World War II/Korean War-era equipments alongside contemporary items, and there was

---

[1] Collectively, Australian and New Zealand troops are informally called ANZACs, from the original Australian and New Zealand Army Corps of World War I. In Vietnam, rotating companies of volunteer NZ infantry served within rotating Royal Australian Regiment battalions, which were then designated e.g. 4 RAR/NZ (ANZAC). 1st Australian Task Force, assigned to Phuoc Tuy Province, was roughly comparable to a regimental combat group: two infantry battalions, an artillery battery, an armed APC squadron, a battle-tank squadron, plus additional combat support and service elements. A troop of the NZ SAS also served with the rotating in-country squadron of the Australian SAS Regiment.

A

RIFLEMAN, 1st CAVALRY DIVISION (AIRMOBILE), 1965

(1) Through 1965 the 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate); 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division; and 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) arrived in Vietnam uniformed and equipped no differently than troops deploying to Europe. The only concessions for the tropics were mosquito nets, a second canteen, and XM16E1 rifles, which were T/O&E weapons for these units from the start. Other Army and Marine units arrived with M14 rifles. Most troops still wore Stateside OG-107 utility uniforms – fatigues – with the hot-humid climate concession of allowing shirts and trousers to be unbloused and sleeves rolled up. Insignia were full-color, and T-shirts white, though some were dyed green in-country. This PFC rifleman is outfitted in M1956 Individual Load-Carrying Equipment.

(2) The standard set of M1956 ILCE was used worldwide by the Army. This set includes: M1956 individual equipment belt; M1956 combat field pack suspenders; two "first pattern" M1956 universal ammunition small arms pouches ("ammo pouches") with Mk IIA1 "pineapple" fragmentation grenades as commonly used early in the war; "first pattern" M1956 lensatic compass or first aid packet case ("first aid pouch") in one of the more common positions; two M1956 water canteen covers; M1961 canvas field pack ("ass" or "butt" pack) with nylon-coated poncho rolled beneath it; M1956 intrenching tool carrier ("e-tool carrier") with M1951 combination intrenching tool; and M7 bayonet-knife in an M8A1 scabbard.

(3) This set's only modification for Vietnam service is a second canteen, in this instance the earlier corrosion-resistant steel (stainless steel) model with Bakelite cap, owing to shortages of M1961 plastic 1qt canteens.

(4) Only one stainless steel canteen cup was issued per man regardless of the number of canteens carried.

(5) One M1956 ILCE item seeing limited use was the M1956 sleeping bag carrier ("spaghetti straps").

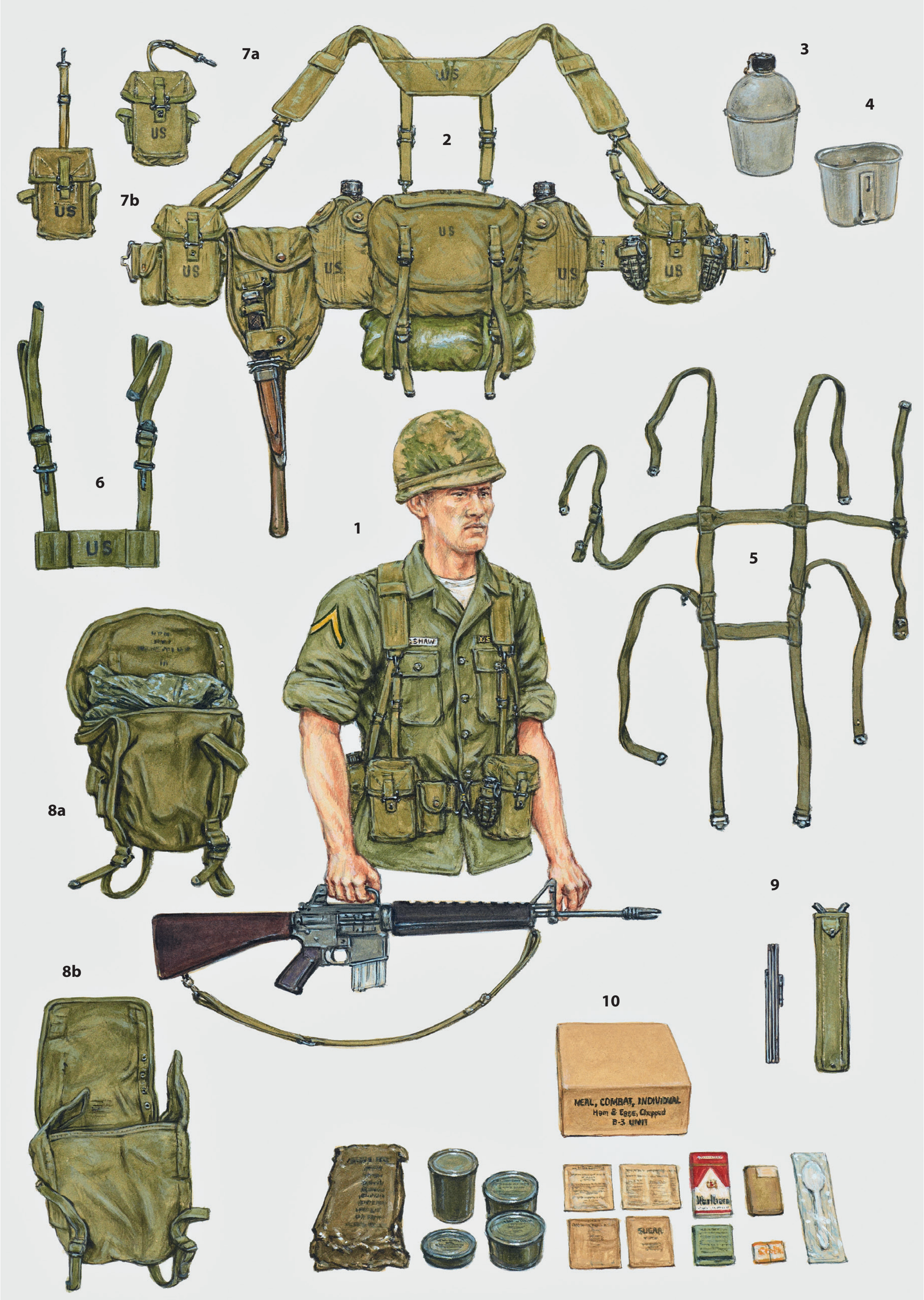
(6) Another was the even less frequently seen M1956 field pack adapter strap assembly.

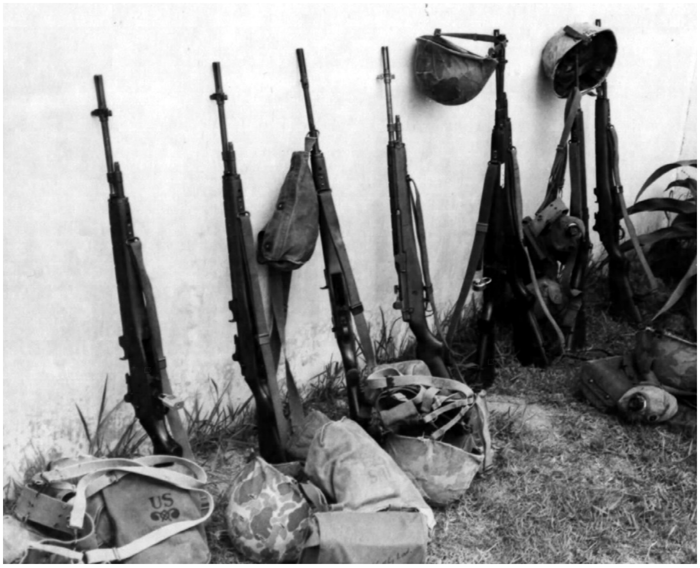
(7) This shows differences between the "first pattern" M1956 universal ammunition small arms pouch **(7a)**, and the "second pattern" M1956 small arms ammunition case **(7b)**.

(8) The interior closure differences of the M1961 canvas field pack **(8a)** and the M1956 combat pack **(8b)**.

(9) The "first pattern" M16A1 rifle bipod carrying case for the XM3 "clothes pin" bipod, usually discarded in practice.

(10 - not to scale) A meal, combat, individual (MCI) or "C-rat" consisted of a meat unit, bread unit, B unit with crackers and candy, a jam or cheese spread, a plastic spoon, and an accessory packet (left) with instant coffee, creamer, sugar, salt, chewing gum, and four cigarettes. The carton measured 6.1in x 3.1in x 5in high. A meal averaged 2lb 9oz; three meals constituted a ration – one day's food.


7a
7b
2
3
4
6
1
5
8a
9
8b
10
MEAL, COMBAT, INDIVIDUAL
Ham & Eggs, Chopped
B-3 UNIT
SUGAR
Marlboro
US



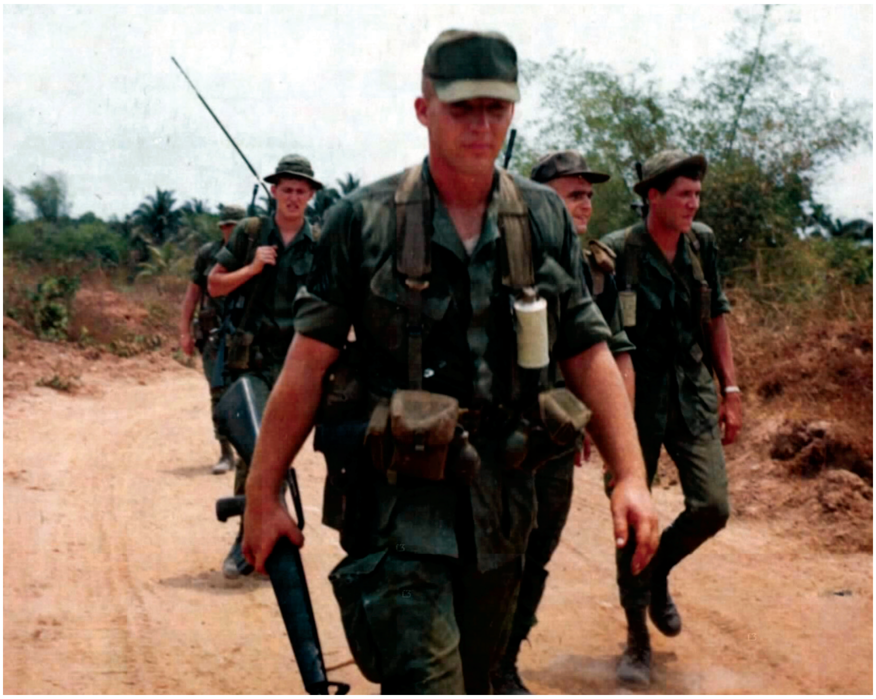
Marine 7.62mm M14 rifles and grounded web gear and helmets. Some of the rifles have padlocks attached through the hole in the safety lever set in the forward end of the trigger guard; this was sometimes done in base camps to reduce accidental discharges. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

also some specially made "indigenous" gear. ("Gear" in this text may refer specifically to "web gear," or to any and all equipment carried by a soldier or marine; ANZAC parlance is "web equipment," "WE," or simply "kit.")

The author used Korean War-era equipment in ROTC, and carried M1956 gear through training and in Vietnam, where it was augmented by nylon M1967 equipment. He also used various items of indigenous gear, as well as the M1945 field pack, M1952 mountain rucksack, M1956 and M1961 combat packs, lightweight rucksack, tropical rucksack, and the CIDG rucksack. For comparison, he has used post-Vietnam ALICE and later gear, plus British Pattern 58 equipments. Most references mention the expedient use of canteen covers and Claymore mine bandoleers for carrying ammunition, but only guestimate their capacity; the author has loaded these carriers with ammunition and magazines to confirm it.

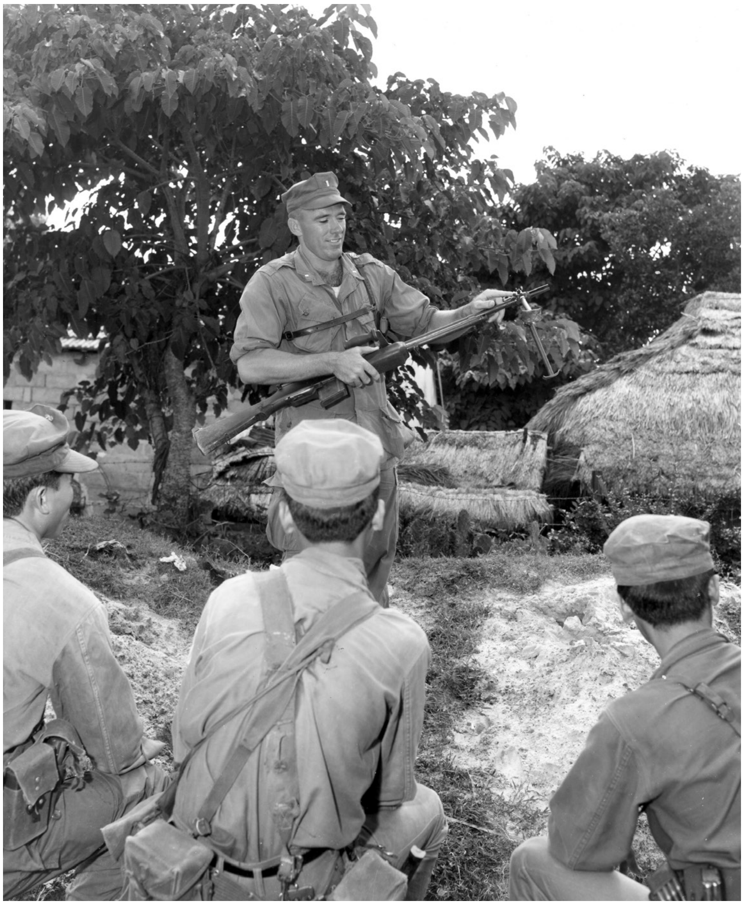
Federal Stock Numbers are provided in the text, to aid collectors in identifying and differentiating between similar items, and in determining if they are of Vietnam-era production.

Words in quotes may be either Vietnam-era slang terms (e.g. "ranger ruck" for ARVN rucksack, "indig" for indigenous gear, etc.); or post-Vietnam terms used by collectors for some items (e.g. "first pattern," etc.).



Soldiers from the 720th Military Police Bn returning from a local security patrol outside a base camp. They wear M1956 web gear with M26 hand grenades, and the AN-M8 white smoke grenades used for screening to break contact. Often the latter's pale green body was scribbled with dark green "loam" camo sticks to make them less conspicuous. MPs were armed with both an M16A1 rifle and an M1911A1 pistol. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

DEVELOPMENT



A Marine first lieutenant instructs a Popular Force squad on the features of the .30cal M1918A2 Browning automatic rifle; one BAR was issued to each PF squad. The PF soldier in the center wears M1956 belt and ammo pouches, but with Korean War-era X-back suspenders. The M1956 universal ammunition pouches would hold either two BAR 20-rd magazines, eight M1 rifle 8-rd clips, or four M2 carbine 30-rd magazines. (US Marine Corps History Division)

Through WW II and the KW the US Army and Marines used individual combat equipments based on designs originating in 1910. At the end of the KW the Army Quartermaster Corps began developing a new system of load-bearing or load-carrying equipment (LBE/LCE – these terms were interchangeable, even in official publications). Prototypes were tested in 1954 and extensive refinements made, to be type-classified (standardized) as the M1956 Individual Load-Carrying Equipment that was adopted in 1957. It took several years to reach National Guard and Reserve units, which used WW II/KW gear into the 1970s. The M1956 was the first fully integrated system since the M1910 gear; from WW I through the mid-1950s there had been constant piecemeal development and issue of new items to fulfill changing needs and accommodate new weapons. By 1945 the soldier was equipped with a hodgepodge of web items, sometimes for redundant purposes.[2]

Any equipment set is partly governed by the weapons carried, and the late 1950s saw the introduction of new weapons. The 7.62mm M14 rifle replaced the M1 Garand, M2 carbine, and most submachine guns. The .45cal M3A1 SMG or "grease gun" remained as "on-vehicle equipment" aboard tanks, combat engineer vehicles, and armored recovery vehicles. The M15 automatic rifle – an M14 with a heavy barrel, bipod, and fire selector lever – was intended to replace the M1918A2 BAR, but to reduce costs standard M14s with M2 bipods and selector levers were issued; these proved inadequate. In an effort to provide a viable squad automatic weapon, the limited-standard M14E2 was fielded in 1963 and standardized as the M14A1 in 1966. In spite of its straight-line stock, two pistol grips, and muzzle compensator, it too was a poor automatic rifle. The .45cal M1911A1 pistol remained the standard sidearm. The 7.62mm M60 general-purpose MG replaced the Browning M1919A4/A6. A new type of weapon that appeared in 1961 was the 40mm M79 grenade launcher.

The 5.56mm XM16E1 rifle was classified as limited standard and issued to airborne, airmobile, and Special Forces (SF) units in 1963. The 173rd Abn Bde; 1st Bde, 101st Airborne Div; and 1st Cav Div (Airmobile) arrived in

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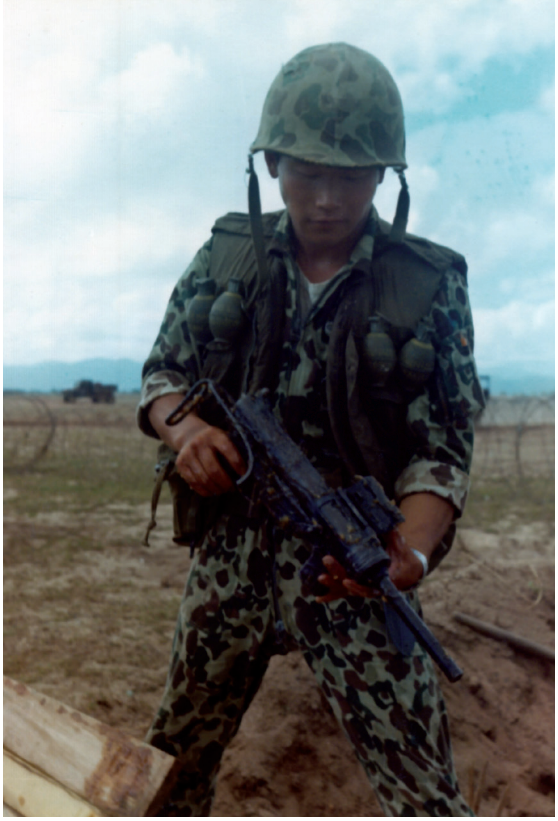
[2] See Elite 210, *World War II US Army Combat Equipments*



A Republic of Korea marine of the 2nd Marine Bde, the "Blue Dragons," wearing a spotted camouflage uniform (a sort of "angular duck-hunter" pattern, of dark and light brown and leaf-green splotches on a grass-green background). He holds an M3A1 submachine gun still packed with cosmoline, and has four M26 "frag" grenades hung on his M1952 body armor vest. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

Vietnam with XM16E1s, while the 1st, 25th, and 4th Inf Divs deployed with M14s, as did the 1st, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 7th, 9th, and 26th Marine Regiments. All later-arriving units deployed with M16s, and those in-country received them in 1967. The ARVN were issued M16s from 1967 and all combat units were equipped by 1968, along with M60s and M79s. In January 1967, the XM16E1 was made Standard A and redesignated the M16A1.

The M1956 web gear's design reduced the previous variety of ammunition carriers, allowing soldiers to easily configure equipment to their requirements. The equipment could also be adapted to the full spectrum of climates: temperate, tropical, desert or arctic. Its principal deficiency was the absurdly small combat pack – the "butt" or "ass" pack. To provide a viable backpack for arctic, mountainous, and tropical regions, the lightweight rucksack was fielded in 1962.

This equipment, and the many subsequent items fielded for Vietnam, were developed mostly by the Army Material Command's Quartermaster Research and Engineering Command (redesignated Natick Laboratories in November 1962) outside Boston, MA. Experimental equipment was tested by troops throughout the US, Alaska, and Panama. Equipment would also be field-tested in Vietnam, often by SF, and feedback led to refinements. Once items were type-classified it might be up to a year before they entered production and finally reached the theater of operations, but critical priority items might be expedited. Army individual equipment was referred to as "TA-50 gear" after the Common Table of Allowances 50-900, *Individual Clothing and Equipment*, and its supply category was Class 2 – individual equipment. Most web items were issued in cartons of 100.

The ANZACs had used British Pattern 37 Web Equipment through WW II and Korea, and late in WW II the British developed the improved P'44 WE for use in the tropics. The ANZACs in Vietnam used mixes of P'37 and P'44 WE alongside the readily available US-designed M1956 gear, both US- and Australian-made. The ANZACs used some US weapons: the M16A1, M60, and grenade launchers. Their battle rifle was the 7.62mm FN L1A1 self-loading rifle, backed initially by Owen and F1 SMGs which were replaced with the M16A1. There was also limited use of the heavy-barrel L2A1 rifle, originally envisaged as a squad automatic.[3]

The ARVN used US WW II/KW gear, as well as M1956 ILCE when issued M16s and M79s; some organizations received M1956 gear before they got M16s. Besides the ARVN, other Vietnamese services used US equipment: Air Force, Navy, Marines, and Regional/Popular Forces. Attached US advisors often used their ARVN unit's equipment.

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[3] Comparable to the M15 concept, the L2A1 was the automatic rifle version of the L1A1 – heavy barrel, bipod integrated into forearm, and fed with 30-rd magazines. It was seldom used by infantry, but was by support troops. "L" in British designations indicates Land Service.

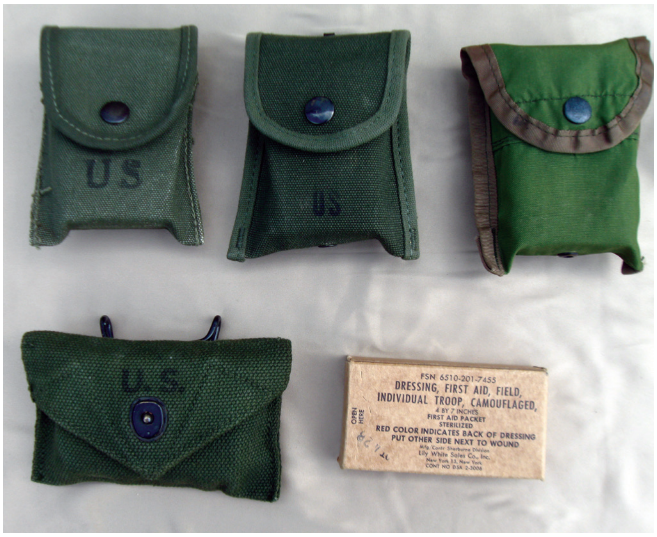
Infantry small arms

This listing shows what types of weapons, and thus what ammunition-carrying equipments, were used by different services, plus the magazine/feed capacity. There were instances when small numbers of a weapon saw limited use in services they are not listed under; e.g., the Australians used very small numbers of Remington Model 870 shotguns. The Philippines, ROK, and Thailand used the same weapons as the ARVN.

Weapon	*US Army*	*Marines*	*ANZAC*	*ARVN*	*Capacity*
.45cal M1911A1 pistol (Colt)	x	x		x	7
.45cal M1A1 SMG (Thompson)				x	30
.45cal M3A1 SMG (“grease gun”)	x	x		x	30
.30cal M1 & M2 carbines				x	15 & 30
.30cal M1 rifle (Garand)				x	8
7.62mm M14 rifle	x	x			20
7.62mm M14 automatic rifle	x	x			20
7.62mm M14E2/A1 automatic rifle	x				20
7.62mm XM21 sniper rifle	x				20
7.62mm M40 sniper rifle (Remington)		x			5
.30cal Model 70 sniper rifle (Winchester)		x			5
.30cal M1918A2 automatic rifle (Browning)				x	20
.30cal M1919A4/A6 MGs (Browning)				x	250 belt
7.62mm M60 machine gun	x	x	x	x	100 belt
5.56mm XM16E1/M16A1 rifle	x	x	x	x	20
5.56mm XM177-series SMGs	x				20 & 30
12-gauge riot shotguns (various)	x	x			4–5
40mm M79 grenade launcher	x	x	x	x	1
40mm XM148 & M203 grenade launchers	x	x	x		1
66mm M72 & M72A1 light AT weapons	x	x	x	x	1
M76 grenade launcher (for M14 rifle)	x	x			1
9mm L9A1 pistol (Browning)			x		13
9mm Mk 2 SMG (Owen)			x		30
9mm F1 SMG			x		34
7.62mm L1A1 self-loading rifle (FN-FAL)			x		20
7.62mm L2A1 automatic rifle (FN-FAL)			x		30
7.62mm Model 82 sniper rifle (Parker Hale)			x		5

The US Special Forces advised and supported a paramilitary organization outside the purview of the ARVN, the Civilian Irregular Defense Group. The CIDG (pronounced “sidge”) consisted of 45,000 “strikers” in Camp and Mobile Strike Forces throughout Vietnam. The USSF also operated special reconnaissance projects. They used a mix of WW II/KW and M1956 equipment, and were also supplied with low-cost alternative indigenous equipment (“indig,” pronounced “indidge”) developed by the CIA-funded Counterinsurgency Support Office.

Being armed with the M16A1, M60, and M79, other Free World Forces – from the Philippines, Republic of Korea, and Thailand – used US M1956 gear supplied through the US Army’s logistics system. All ROK Army and Marine troops arrived with M1 rifles, M1/M2 carbines, M1918A2 BARs, and M1919A6 LMGs, and with US WW II/KW web gear. Most support units retained these weapons, with only combat units receiving the M16A1, M60, and M79, but most units eventually received M1956 gear. Most Thai combat units arrived in Vietnam with the new weapons or received them upon arrival.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U.S.
FSN 6510-201-7455
DRESSING, FIRST AID, FIELD,
INDIVIDUAL TROOP, CAMOUFLAGED,
4 BY 7 INCHES
FIRST AID PACKET
STERILIZED
RED COLOR INDICATES BACK OF DRESSING
PUT OTHER SIDE NEXT TO WOUND
Mfg/Contr Sherburne Division
Lily White Sales Co., Inc.
New York 13, New York
CONT NO DSA 2-3006
OPEN HERE

This display of Vietnam-era first aid pouches demonstrates the wide color variations of web gear, and differences in the black "US" stamp.
(Top row, left to right:) "first pattern" M1956 lensatic compass or first aid packet case; "second pattern" M1956 field first aid dressing–unmounted magnetic compass case; and nylon M1967 field first aid–unmounted magnetic compass case.
(Bottom:) World War II or Korean War-era first aid packet and lensatic compass pouch, with one of the many variants of "field dressings." For scale, this particular field dressing box is 1¼in x 2¼in x 4¼in; the dressing itself was ½in x 4in x 7in. (Trey Moore Collection)

MATERIALS

Besides normal wear and tear, Vietnam's extremes of climate shortened equipment life even though the materials had been well proved over decades of use. The Vietnam War saw the introduction of new materials: nylon, improved plastics, vinyl waterproofing, and light alloys.

Colors

Green shades are the most effective in the lush tropics; browns, tans, and black help blend if they are not overly contrasting.

American WW II/KW equipments were Olive Drab Shade No. 7, a dark brownish-green color that was adopted in 1944 to replace OD Shade No. 3 – a slightly lighter grayish-green shade. This in turn had replaced in 1941 OD Shade No. 9 – actually tan (not called "khaki").

The Engineer Research and Development Laboratory (ERDL) camouflage pattern developed in 1948, of medium green, brown, and black on a pale green backing, was used for some fabric items from 1967. While of the same colors and design as the post-Vietnam woodland pattern (Battle Dress Uniform), the ERDL pattern consisted of smaller splotches. It was seldom that equipment was camouflage-painted, and this was mostly found in reconnaissance teams on an individual or team basis, using green, brown, and black spray-paints.

Most OD uniform shades were replaced by Olive Green Shade No. 107 in 1952, but web gear remained OD No. 7. Many non-web items were now OG, a slightly darker green tint; actual OG/OD shades varied according to the weave, density, and material, resulting in components of different shades on a given piece of gear. Straps and edge-binding could be of noticeably different shades than main body/components.

Australian P'37 webbing equipments were tan or light brown (called "khaki"), while P'44 was dark jungle green (JG), a greener shade than OG. Much of the later Australian-made M1956 gear was a lighter OD with "lime-green" nylon edge-binding.

"Indig gear" was of widely varied colors; specifications were not rigid, and latitude was allowed by contractors in Okinawa, Thailand, the Philippines, Japan, and the ROK. Colors included gray, gray-green, light green, and dark OD.

Markings

A bewildering array of data is found on web gear. Black sans-serif block capitals "US" (or on older items a serif font with periods, "U.S.") were stamped on fabric and impressed on metal items. Marine items were seldom marked "U.S.M.C." but did use a block "US," though this was often hidden on WW II/KW gear.

Manufacturing data was either stamped directly on fabric or printed on sewn-on white or light green tags. Markings are often illegible owing to coarsely woven webbing or to fading. Information might include the nomenclature, manufacturer, date or year, specification number, contract number, and the QM stock number or Federal Stock Number. Pre-Vietnam gear often showed only minimal data, though some packs included extensive instructions printed on large labels. Marine gear was marked essentially the same, but often bore minimal or no data.

Contract numbers were preceded with "DA" (Defense Agency) for gear produced in 1953–61 regardless of service. It was superseded by "DSA-1-" (Defense Supply Agency) in 1962–77. From 1967, "DSA-100-" contract numbers included a two-digit year as the second group of numbers, e.g., "DSA-100-68-" for 1968; earlier contract numbers lacked the year. "DLA-100-" (Defense Logistics Agency) contracts were post-1977.

The Joint Army-Navy Catalog System's Federal Stock Number eleven-digit code was used from 1949 to 1975 by all services, and the use of WW II QM stock numbers and FSNs overlapped into the 1950s. It should be noted that while the FSN system had been implemented before the KW, many items retained their WW II stock numbers and were never assigned FSNs, even though they remained in production through the KW. However, other items were assigned new FSN numbers; this resulted in the same items being found with one or the other stock number – for example, "30-round carbine magazine pockets" may be found marked with 74-P-142-705, or FSN 8465-254-2171. The FSN numbers for individual equipment items began with "8465" – the Federal Supply Classification Group – followed by the seven-digit item serial number. The last four digits identify different sizes if there is more than one. "1005-" identifies items related to weapons under 30mm caliber. With WW II QM stock numbers, the first two numbers identified Class 74 (individual field equipment). Sometimes the same item made in cotton and nylon versions had the same FSN, the difference being a specification change.

In 1975 the FSN was replaced by the 13-digit National Stock Number (aka "NATO Stock Number"). Items retained the same FSN eleven digits, but the country code ("00" or "01" for the US) was added after the first four digits. Items identified by an NSN with "00" or "01" as the fifth and sixth digits were *not* produced during the Vietnam War.

Most Australian web equipment was not marked. If it was, it was with a manufacturer's abbreviation, year, and sometimes the Catalog Number, commonly known as the item's "Stores Number." General issue items were prefixed "AA," while "AF" were special issue, e.g., jungle equipment, followed by a four-digit number. This was used until the NSN system was adopted in 1975 (with the country code "66"). Some items were marked "D↑D" for Australian Department of Defence with the small broad-arrow mark signifying government property, or with the traditional larger broad arrow alone. Some Diggers marked an "A" and "T" on either side of the "US" marking to convert it to "AUST."

ARVN and indigenous gear seldom bore markings. This was partly because of the need for "sterile equipment" used by MACV-SOG to not be attributable to the US. ARVN equipment might be marked "Q.L.V.N.C.H." (*Quan Luc Viet Nam Cong Hoa* – ARVN).

Fabric and webbing

Web gear was almost universally made of cotton canvas (duck) and webbing. Duck was water-repellent and windproof, but while the threads were tightly woven it was not truly waterproof – it would not prevent water from soaking through. Some duck was waterproof-treated with synthetic compounds when the yarns were dyed, or waterproofed by coating one or both sides with vinyl. The webbing used for connecting, supporting, and securing straps varied from heavy, thickly woven equipment belts to thin, lightweight edge-binding ranging in widths from ½in to 2¼in. Stiff, heavy webbing proved uncomfortable in the tropics owing to chafing through thin, sweat-soaked uniform fabric; in temperate and cold climates, heavier multi-layered clothing provided padding.

Cotton duck and webbing absorbed water up to 40 percent its own weight, was slow to dry, susceptible to dry rot with frequent wetting and drying, deteriorated at only 300°F (149°C), and ignited at 410°F (210°C). Damp cotton attracted mildew and fungus. OD polyester thread was used. In 1962 the Army adopted its first nylon equipment item, the lightweight rucksack. The next step was the M1967 Individual Load-Carrying Equipment (ILCE), a nylon equivalent of the cotton M1956 gear. Nylon, besides being lighter than cotton equivalents, resists mildew, absorbs only 8 percent its weight in water, dries faster, and resists abrasion well.[4] It is somewhat shiny and stiff when new, and causes a slight rustling noise in vegetation until broken-in. It melts at 482°F (250°C), and cigarette embers can burn pinholes. Prolonged exposure to ultraviolet sunlight and heat sources gradually degrades nylon.

Leather, which deteriorates rapidly in the humid tropics, saw little use except for holsters, binocular cases, and reinforcing. Black replaced brown leather in the US Army beginning in 1957, and existing items were dyed.

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[4] For a simple weight comparison between cotton and nylon: the cotton canvas M1956 canteen cover weighed 7.68oz, and the nylon M1967 cover 4.76oz.

B

ARTILLERYMAN, 1st INFANTRY DIVISION, 1968

(1) Development of nylon M1967 Modernized Load-Carrying Equipment to replace the cotton M1956 ILCE began at the time the first US combat troops arrived in Vietnam in 1965, but MLCE was not fielded until 1968. Some troops, especially rear-echelon types, received full sets of nylon gear, as in the case of this assistant gunner (one of the Army's few positions for corporals); note that many "Big Red One" troops shunned the subdued patch with a black "1." More often M1967 MLCE items were issued piecemeal to replace lost, damaged, and worn-out cotton gear, though officers above company level often acquired complete sets. M1967 items were designed to be nylon equivalents of M1956 gear; both systems' components were interchangeable and were routinely mixed, especially among infantrymen.

(2) The M1967 MLCE was intended only for use in Southeast Asia; besides nylon webbing and duck, plastic and aluminum hardware were used instead of brass and steel. This complete set includes: M1967 individual equipment belt; M1967 individual equipment belt suspenders; two M1967 small arms ammunition cases, with an M26 "lemon grenade;" M1967 field first aid/unmounted magnetic compass case on one suspender, and "snaplink" (carabiner) on the other; M7 bayonet-knife in an M8A1 scabbard; M1967 intrenching tool carrier with M1967 collapsible intrenching tool; M1967 combat field pack, with wet-weather poncho rolled beneath it; and M1967 water canteen cover.

(3) This M1961 plastic canteen has a 50-tablet water purification bottle taped to the cap securing strap.

(4) The front and back of the M1967 canteen cover; the back of the M1956 was similar.

(5) The ¾qt canteen cup with the handle extended.

(6) The simplified M1967 sleeping gear carrier was little used.

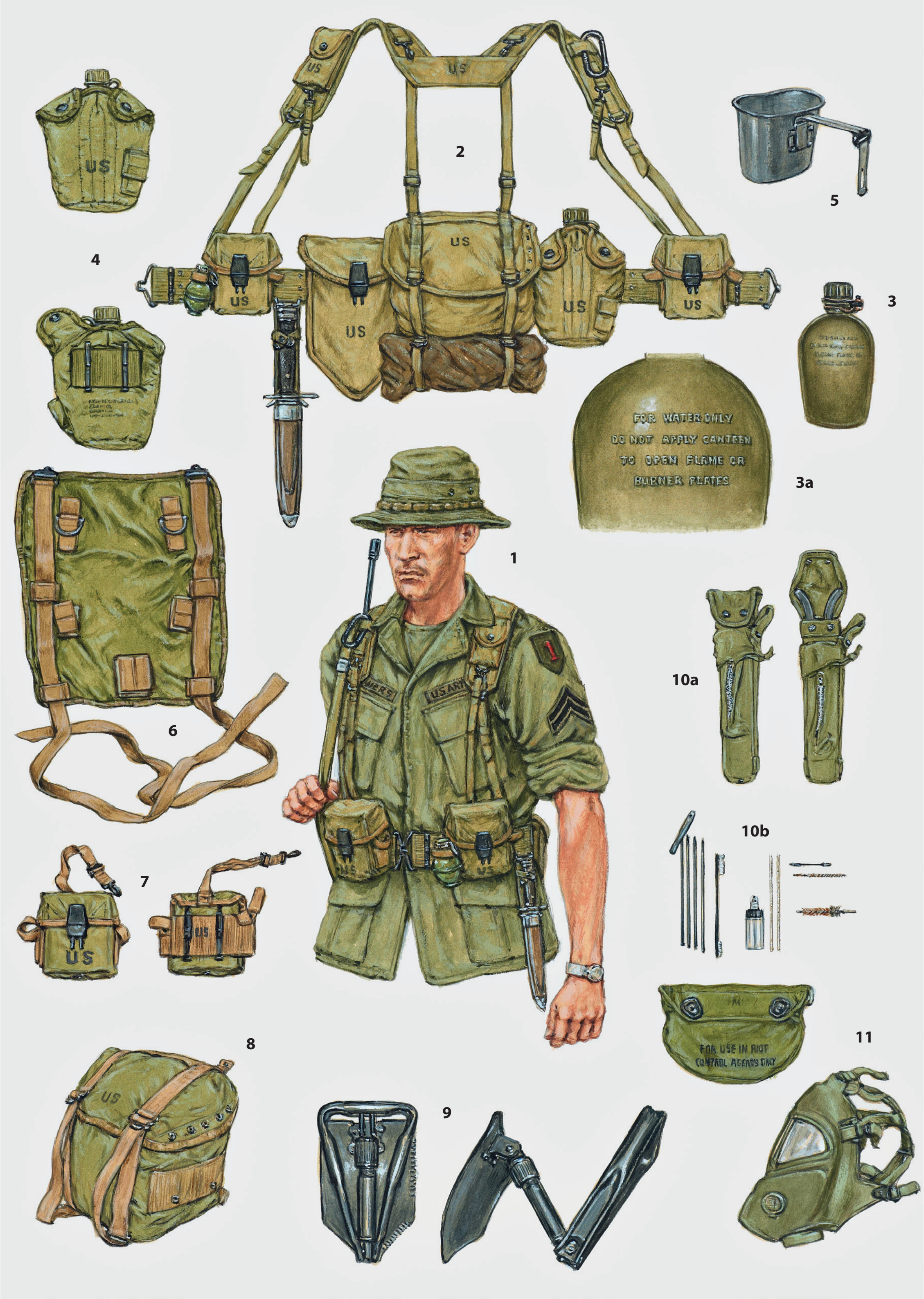
(7) The front and back of an M1967 small arms ammunition case for four 20-rd M16A1 magazines.

(8) An M1967 butt pack, showing the eyelets on the flap's right edge and the side equipment loops. If heavy items such as canteens were attached to the flap eyelets they made it awkward to open the pack.

(9) The M1967 collapsible intrenching tool or "tri-fold e-tool." Lighter than earlier models, it was therefore less effective for digging in hard soil, and hacking with the blade locked at 90 degrees was less comfortable.

(10a) The "second pattern" bipod carrying case included a slot for the cleaning rod and a pocket for cleaning items **(10b)**.

(11) The XM28E4 riot control agent mask or "CS mask," and XM19 riot control agent mask carrier, were attached low on the left suspender strap or on the belt.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FOR USE IN RIOT
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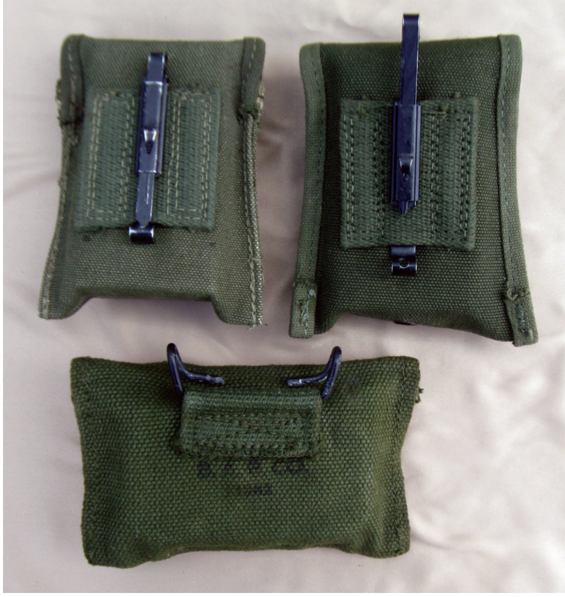


The rear side of the "first pattern" M1956 lensatic compass or first aid packet case (left) displays a closed slide-keeper, while the "second pattern" M1956 field first aid dressing–unmounted magnetic compass case (right) shows the slide-keeper open. The first aid packet and lensatic compass pouch (bottom), dating from WW II and the Korean War and still in use, has an M1910 double-hook. (Trey Moore Collection)

Holsters and "binos" cases were black, but the latter were often painted OD; leather reinforcing on web gear was tan or light brown. Velcro® tape fastening was introduced to replace some snaps and zippers (officially, "dome" and "slide" fasteners, respectively); if opened quickly it makes a faint ripping noise, and can pick up dirt and vegetation debris that degrades its effectiveness. One versatile material was "550 cord," a 5/32in-diameter Type III parachute suspension line (4020-240-2146) so called from its 550lb test strength. Employed for "dummy cords" (tie-down cords and lanyards), 550 cord consisted of an OD nylon sheath encasing 7–9 white nylon yarns.

Metal fittings

A variety of metal fittings and components ("hardware") were used on equipment, made from steel, brass, aluminum, and alloys which resist rust and corrosion. Metal fittings were black-lacquered or chemically blackened with selenium dioxide – aka "black-oxidized;" blacking often rubbed off with use. Metal and plastic items such as helmets, e-tools, bayonet scabbards, rucksack frames, cans, and containers were in dark OD Shade No. 22.

Metal fittings included lift-the-dot fasteners, snaps, buttons, rivets, eyelets, grommets, suspension rings (D-rings, V-rings, rectangular rings), hangers, swivels, snaphooks, quick-adjuster buckles, adapters, slide loops, belt fasteners, buckles with tongued or tongueless bars, friction buckles with sliding toothed or untoothed bars, and strap-end protectors (rounded or squared). Most pouches and cases had a drainage eyelet in the bottom.

An important fitting was the **"double-hook"** widely used on M1910 and later equipment – the "M1910 hook" (5340-297-6834). This large-gauge wire hook was secured to equipment carriers, cases, pouches, pockets, scabbards, etc., usually by heavy 2in-wide webbing hangers stitched and/or riveted to the item. The hook's long bar was 2⅛in long, with a 1in-high looped hook on both ends that engaged with pairs of eyelets on belts and the equipment tabs on packs. The hooks were difficult to attach, but had the benefit of seldom coming unfastened. While replaced by M1956 slide-keepers they remained in use on older equipment, and were compatible with M1956 and later equipment. **Lift-the-dot (LTD) fasteners**, first adopted in 1917, remained the primary flap-fasteners on web equipment until 1956, when improved dome snaps were adopted. They continued in use on the remaining pre-1956 items and a few newer items requiring heavy-duty fasteners.

The **M1956 slide-keeper or belt-strap keeper** (5340-753-5580) was developed as an alternative to the double-hook for attaching items to an equipment belt or loop more firmly than the old double-hook. Called a "vertical sliding bar attachment" and made of black-lacquered steel, it consisted of a rigid back bar fastened to M1956 and M1967 equipment by web loops, usually in pairs; a vertical sliding bar fitted to the back bar, sliding over the belt or pack attachment loop and engaging in a slot in the lower end of the back bar. Today they are known as "ALICE clips," as they are used on the post-Vietnam ALICE and later equipment.

Lightweight Individual Clothing and Equipment Program

The LINCLOE Program was launched in 1965 with the deployment of combat troops to Vietnam. Its goal was to develop and standardize lighter weight individual equipment, and it was essentially a continuation of development of the 1956 ILCE. Feedback from soldiers regarding the M1956 and other gear collected in 1962 was incorporated into the study. The LINCLOE Program strove to develop nylon equipment to replace the cotton M1956. The goal was for a 3lb equipment set and 3.3lb field pack. The result was the M1967 MLCE, intended only for use in tropical regions. Its true value, regardless of its particular shortcomings, was the continued development of further improved nylon equipment in 1969; most problems involved the closure snaps and fasteners. The M1972 equipment was approved for standardization in 1973, and issued in 1974 as the All-Purpose Lightweight Individual Carrying Equipment (ALICE). ALICE was superseded in its turn by the Modular Lightweight Load-carrying Equipment (MOLLE) between 1997 and 2003.

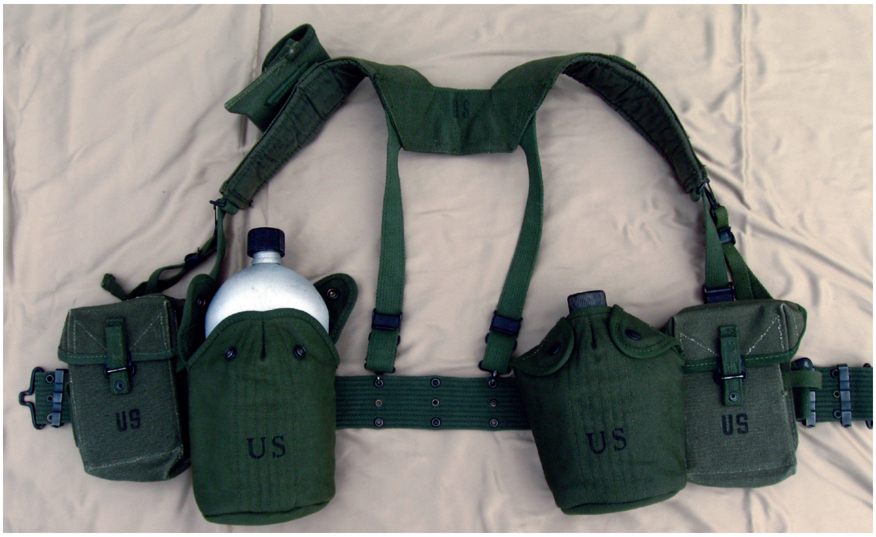
Black "plastic" two-prong compression latches were made of hard, high-density nylon. Introduced with M1967 nylon LBE, they were mainly used to secure ammunition cases and some other items. Aluminum fittings and plastic snaps were also introduced with M1967 gear, but snaps reverted to metal when plastic examples proved to break easily.

Beginning with the development of the M1956 ILCE, the equipment was designed for two load configurations. The basic "fighting load" consisted of the belt and suspenders with ammunition carriers, first aid pouch, water canteen, e-tool, bayonet, and a small combat pack for poncho, rations, toilet articles, and dry socks. The "existence load," carried in an inadequate sleeping-bag carrier or more effective rucksack, consisted of items needed to sustain the soldier, and included regionally/seasonally appropriate sleeping gear (sleeping bag, air mattress, poncho liner, etc.) plus spare clothing. Also included were battlefield survival essentials: steel helmet, body armor, and protective mask.

M1956 INDIVIDUAL LOAD-CARRYING EQUIPMENT

Development of the M1956 ILCE began at the end of the KW, and prototypes were tested in 1954; while the improved version was approved in 1956, it was not standardized until March 1957. It was about 2½lb lighter than the KW gear. Units were not issued with it until they received the M14 rifle, and even then there were M14-armed units still using KW web gear. Units deploying to Vietnam were fully equipped with M1956 gear. Made of OD No. 7 cotton, it was reasonably robust. The major complaints were its added weight when soaking wet, and the lack of a compatible rucksack. The small combat or butt pack, barely able to carry a full day's C-rations, was a result of an unrealistic expectation that soldiers would enjoy immediate resupply on a European battlefield. The thinking was that they merely had to extend their hand to the rear to receive ammunition and rations, and they would never see 5-gallon water cans. They would ride into battle in armored personnel carriers, while truck transport carried bedding, shelter, food, and water for extended operations.

Standard "Stateside" configuration saw the two ammunition cases on the belt's right and left front, combat pack on the back, canteen on the right hip,



A basic set of Army M1956 Individual Load-Carrying Equipment, including the individual equipment belt and combat field pack suspenders; "first pattern" lensatic compass or first aid packet case on the left suspender strap; two "first pattern" universal ammunition small arms pouches, each holding two M14 or four M16A1 rifle magazines; and two water canteen covers with 1qt corrosion-resistant steel canteens, which were used throughout the war alongside plastic M1961 1qt water canteens. (Trey Moore collection)

and e-tool carrier with bayonet on the left hip. The field dressing case could be on the right end of the belt, the left side of the right ammunition case, or the left shoulder-strap loop – not on the right, where it interfered with shouldering a weapon. It could be attached with the opening either upright or upside-down, supposedly to let the dressing fall into one's hand when opened. (The reality was that if caught on brush the flap opened and the dressing was lost; and a wounded soldier is usually prone, so it is unnecessary for the dressing to drop out.) The first reality discovered in Vietnam was the need for more than five M14 or seven M16 magazines; sometimes two additional ammo cases were added, and bandoleers of clipped rounds were also carried. (Outside of Vietnam, neither automatic riflemen nor grenadiers were authorized additional pouches – uniformity was considered more important.)

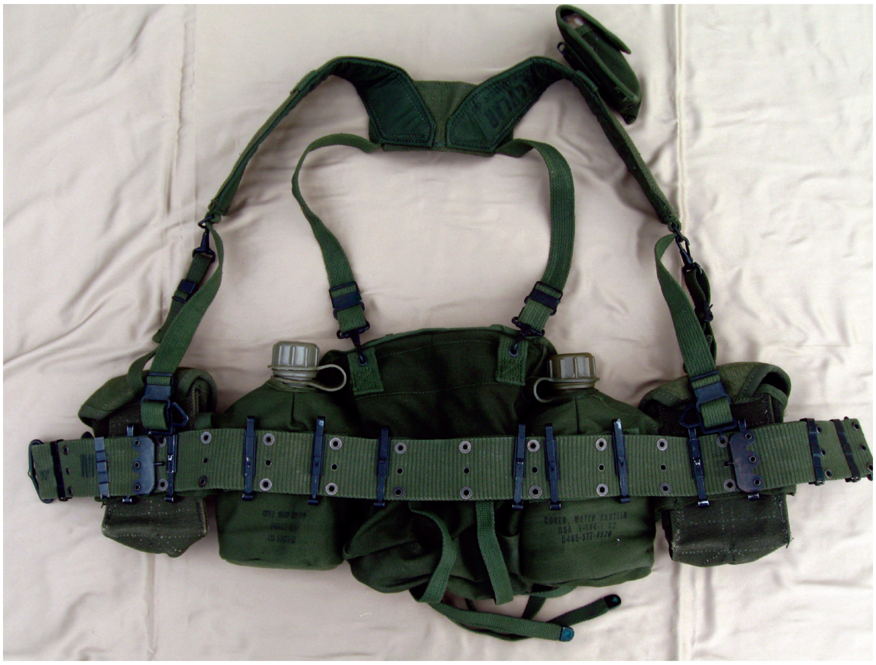
The **M1956 individual equipment belt** (8465-577-4925 – Medium; 8465-577-4924 – Large) was commonly called a "pistol belt" due to its similarity to the old M1936 item, and early production were even stamped as such. The thick webbing was initially woven in a pattern of 11 horizontal wefts (woven ridges), but changed to vertical wefts in 1966. It was adjustable at both ends, unlike the M1936 adjustable at the right end; an adjusting hook was fitted on both ends to engage with small eyelets positioned at 2½in intervals along the centerline. Above and below these were larger eyelets, the upper to attach suspenders and the lower to attach equipment with double-hooks. Two adjusting keepers were fitted on the ends. The buckle was a "slot-and-ball" type. In 1967 the stamped aluminum Davis quick-release buckle assembly (2540-981-8607 – a patented buckle developed by Davis Aircraft Products Co. Inc., Northport, NY) was added; there were complaints that it came unfastened too easily, especially in the prone position.

The **M1956 combat field pack suspenders** (8465-577-4922 – Regular; 8465-577-4923 – Long; 8465-823-7231 – Extra-Long) or "H-harness" consisted of a pair of lightly padded shoulder straps connected by a web yoke across the shoulders. (They are also found designated "M1956 individual equipment belt suspenders" with the same FSNs.) On the front end of each shoulder strap was a 1in adjustable strap with a wire hook to attach to the belt; these were later replaced by stamped hooks. Rectangular rings on the ends of the shoulder straps were to attach the ammunition case straps. On the back end of each shoulder strap was another 1in adjustable strap with a wire hook; in 1961 this was replaced by a snaphook to eliminate accidental detachment. These were attached to tabs on the top back of the combat pack if worn, or extended further and attached to belt eyelets. The undersides of the shoulder straps were replaced by harder-wearing nylon in the early 1970s. Centered on the front of each shoulder strap was a 1in web loop to which a first aid/compass case, strobe light, knife, etc., could be attached. Suspenders were issued in three sizes, although some troops were not aware of this, and wore the ill-fitting suspenders they were issued. Regular (R) were for soldiers under 68in tall, large (L) for 68–74in, and extra-long (XL) for men over 74in and large-chested men. When ammunition cases were not worn or were empty, the front suspender straps could be attached to the belt below the arms to help prevent the belt from riding up.

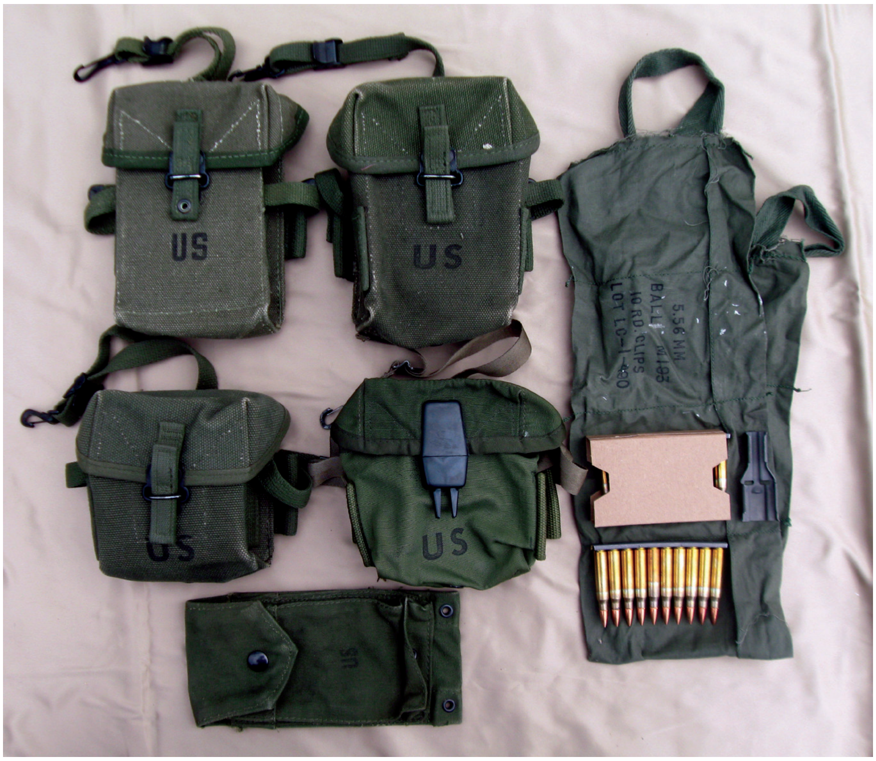
Ammunition pouches

There were three M1956-type ammo pouches. The **M1956 universal ammunition small arms pouch** (8465-647-0852) was a rectangular case with a hinged box-type lid ("first pattern," to collectors). Riveted on the lid's front was a securing tab with a rectangular ring, which was inserted through another ring riveted on the front of the case; a small eyelet set in the tab provided friction to retain it in the ring. Fiber reinforcing panels were sewn into the case's front and sides to prevent damage to the magazines when prone; these were later replaced by semi-rigid plastic panels. In the back piece was a rigid plastic panel, which helped prevent groin injuries from magazines when prone. On the back were two slide-keepers, and a narrow web support strap fitted with a snaphook and adjuster that rose to attach to a rectangular ring on the lower end of the suspenders.

On both sides were web loops for a hand grenade lever, plus a snap-secured strap that wrapped around the grenade's fuze. These were not considered secure by some units, who discouraged carrying grenades on the



Inside or back view of the M1956 ILCE, this time with the butt pack attached. Both the M1956 combat field pack and M1961 canvas field pack were attached to the belt by slide-keepers, and to the suspender straps by eyelet-tabs on the packs. At both ends of the belt can be seen the length adjustment by means of a small hook and the central line of eyelets. Note the printed "M" for Medium near the left end of the belt, which was also available in Large. The Medium size could be adjusted between 27in and 44in (waist sizes under 30in) and the Large between 45in and 56in (waist sizes over 30 inches). (Trey Moore Collection)



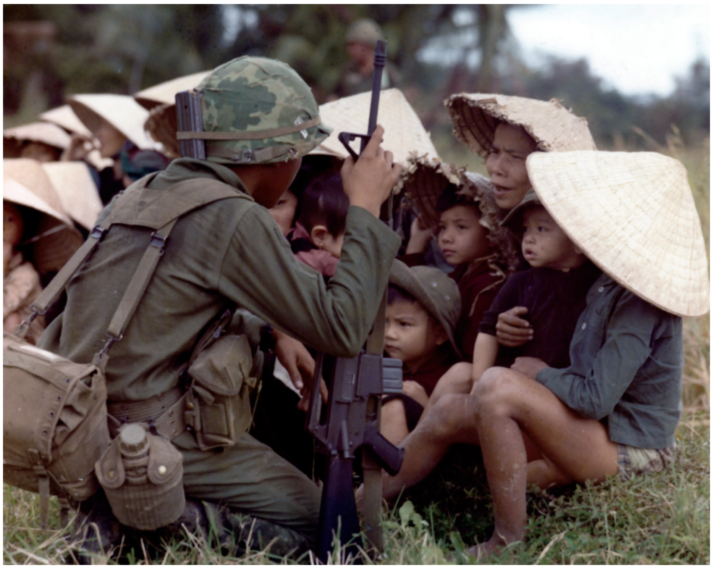
The means of carrying 20-rd magazines for the M14 and M16A1 rifles:
(Top left) M1956 universal ammunition small arms pouch ("first pattern"), for 2x M14 or 4x M16A1 magazines.
(Top right) M1956 small arms ammunition case ("second pattern").
(Middle left) M16A1 rifle ammunition small arms case, for 4x magazines.
(Middle right) M1967 small arms ammunition case, again for 4x M16A1 magazines.
(Bottom, turned with top to left) Marine M1961 ammunition magazine pocket, for one M14 or M16A1 magazine.
(Right) M3 bandoleer with seven pockets; each could hold either an M16A1 magazine, or 2x 10-rd stripper clips for charging magazines. Two clips are shown here with and without cardboard protective sleeves, and (right) a magazine filler or "spoon." The similar M2 six-pocket bandoleer held 12x 5-rd charging clips for the M14. (Trey Moore Collection)

pouches. M26-series grenades fitted better than M67-series, and beer can-size smoke and chemical grenades did not fit well.

The "universal" in the designation indicated that it held 2x M14 rifle 20-rd magazines, 4x M16 rifle 20-rd magazines, 4x M2 carbine 30-rd magazines, a bandoleer of 6x 8-rd M1 rifle clips, 8x M1 clips without bandoleer, 2x BAR or Australian L1A1 rifle 20-rd magazines (tight fit), 24x 12-gauge shotgun shells, 3x 40mm grenades (two nose down, one horizontally on top), or 3x hand grenades internally. M16 magazines were too short to conveniently withdraw, so soldiers inserted a field dressing or folded sock underneath to raise them. Some pouches were too tight and held only three magazines.

The universal pouch was supplemented by the **M1956 small arms ammunition case** ("second pattern," same FSN) in June 1962. Confusingly, both versions were commonly called "M14 ammo pouches" even when carrying M16 magazines, and a soldier might have both types. The second pattern lacked the securing tab's eyelet and the plastic panel in the front piece. Its removal made the case less rigid, and, with nothing to raise the magazines, some soldiers squeezed in a fifth mag horizontally on top; magazines were still difficult to remove. Many references say three M14 mags could be held, but the author has attempted this, and only two fit. In the fall of 1967, basic training units turned in one M14 mag case per trainee because of shortages in Vietnam.

The **M16A1 rifle ammunition small arms case** (8465-935-4871), adopted in August 1967, was essentially the preceding case shortened for 4x M16A1 20-rd magazines, and was not intended for other ammunition items. It lacked plastic reinforcing panels. The magazines protruded ¾in from this "M16 ammo" or "short ammo" pouch, making them easier to extract.



A Vietnamese interpreter questioning villagers carries M1956 web gear. The combat field pack typically held C-rations, dry socks, and toilet articles. A 20-rd M16A1 rifle magazine is held in the "camo band" at the back of his helmet for rapid access, and on the right side is the ubiquitous P-38 folding can opener. Hard running and busting through brush could dislodge magazines carried in this way, as the camo band's elastic was not very strong. (Tom Laemlein/ Armor Plate Press)

Compass/first aid cases

There were two styles of "first aid pouches." The **M1956 lensatic compass or first aid packet case** (8465-577-4927 – "first pattern") had a flap with edge-binding and secured by a snap fastener. The side seams and the opening's lip were sewn without edge-binding, and there was a single slide-keeper on the back. The pretentiously designated **M1956 field first aid dressing–unmounted magnetic compass case** (same FSN – "second pattern") was introduced in about 1960. The side edges and the opening's lip had edge-binding, and there was a drainage eyelet. If carrying a compass, a 2–3ft "dummy cord" linked the compass and case through the bottom eyelet. The **field first-aid dressing** (6510-201-7435) was a ½in-thick, 4in x 7in cotton and gauze pad with 2ft-long OD tie-tapes. The backing was OD, marked in red to indicate that the other side was placed on the wound. The dressing was packaged in a 4in x 2in x 1in waterproof buff paper wrapping with a clear plastic cover. Similar older "field dressings," some in cardboard cartons dating from the KW rather than plastic, were also issued.

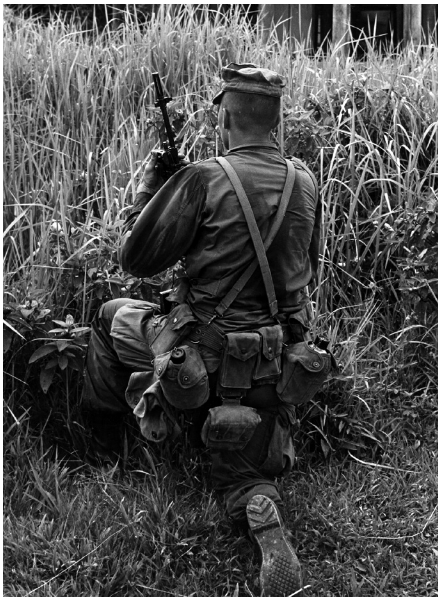
Canteen and e-tool covers

The **M1956 water canteen cover** (8465-860-0256) held a 1-qt canteen nested in a canteen cup. It was basically the M1910 cover, but with two slide-keepers rather than a double-hook. The cover's two "shoulder" flaps fastened with snaps rather than LTD fasteners. The canvas cover was lined with gray felt until 1961, when OG synthetic pile ("fake fur") was introduced for better insulation. In 1967 the flaps' cotton edge-binding was replaced with nylon to reduce wear. Canteen covers could expediently carry five or six grenades depending on model, or 6x M16 20-rd magazines (five upright, one flat on top, sometimes one more in front of the five), or 7x 40mm grenades.

The **M1956 intrenching tool carrier** (8465-542-5842) consisted of a case shaped like the e-tool blade with a snap-secured top flap. On the outside were a leather-reinforced tab for the bayonet scabbard's double-hooks and a snap-secured tab to prevent the scabbard bouncing; attaching the bayonet to the carrier freed up belt space. On the back were two slide-keepers.

Field packs, etc.

The rectangular **M1956 combat field pack** (8465-577-4921) attached to the back of the belt with slide-keepers, and the suspender straps snap-hooked to tabs on its top. The long top flap allowed over-packing, and was secured by two straps; dust flaps on the sides inadequately protected the contents. There were two straps to secure a rolled poncho beneath the pack, and web loops on the sides allowed attachment of items with slide-keepers. On the top flap were a clear plastic name-label slot, and a carrying strap; five eyelets were set along the right edge to attach items with double-hooks. Totally unsuited for



This shows the very different appearance of the Army's and the US Marines' initial web gear – compare with the previous photo. The marine is identifiable not only by his "cover," but by his X-back M1941 suspenders, and his M1961 belt and ammo pouches, one of them with (unusually) the USMC individual first aid pouch double-hooked beneath it. Armed with an M14 automatic rifle (three per rifle squad), he therefore carries more magazines than usual. (US Marine Corps History Division)

Vietnam, this "ass" or "butt" pack held only one or two C-ration meals, socks, and toilet articles; nor could it be worn in conjunction with a rucksack, since that hung too low over the belt.

The **M1961 canvas field pack** (8465-823-7622) was an inch larger all round than the M1956, which remained in use. The M1961 had a wider, more rounded flap with extended ends better protecting the contents; rather than dust flaps, it had a generous vinyl-coated fabric throat that could be rolled shut. Originally a 23-page pamphlet, *Heavy Hints for Light Packs*, was issued with it; this was replaced by an instruction sheet in 1966, *Assembly Instructions for Individual Load-Carrying Equipment*. Both included instructions for all M1956 LCE.

The **M1956 field pack adapter strap assembly** (8465-782-2170) was introduced in the early 1960s to allow butt packs to be fitted to the suspenders behind the shoulders. This addition to make the obsolescent combat pack more convenient by providing an alternative position was seldom used. It consisted of two narrow straps connected at one end by a wider strap, and fastened to the same suspender attachments as the sleeping bag carrier. The

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MARINE RIFLEMAN, 1st MARINE DIVISION, 1965

(1) The Marines arrived in Vietnam outfitted in a combination of World War II, Korean War, and early 1960s equipment to accommodate the M14 rifle. This marine, with a "C-rat" spoon kept handy under his helmet "camo band," wears an M1955 body armor vest, a mandatory practice in the Corps. The "flak jacket's" bottom edge had eyelets for double-hooks, but attaching equipment there was too cumbersome for it to be a frequent practice. The Marines were at first no better prepared for jungle warfare than the Army; with time their "782 gear" (sometimes with elements still in WWII tan color) gradually improved, and evolved into a mix of Marine and Army equipment.

(2) In 1965 the arriving marines armed with the M14 had web gear consisting of: M1961 cartridge belt; M1941 belt suspenders, here in World War II tan; four M1961 ammunition magazine pockets; two 1qt steel canteens; first aid pouch, and individual first aid kit. Here a Mk 1 Mod 2 illumination grenade hangs from a suspender's O-ring.

(3) The upper item in this post-1967 set is the "M1944" combat field pack, attached to OD M1941 belt suspenders with added shoulder pads, and the lower one is the "M1944" cargo field pack (actually seldom carried in the field) attached to the suspenders and the M1961 belt. The M1943 intrenching tool is attached to the combat pack, along with the M7 bayonet for the M16A1. The belt has the Army "second pattern" M16A1 rifle ammunition small arms cases, adopted in August 1967 to hold four magazines each; a first aid pouch; and two 1qt plastic canteens.

(4) The end of an M1961 belt is shown with the two ways of attaching the M1961 magazine pockets, each holding a single M14 rifle magazine. One is attached upside-down, allowing the magazine to be dropped into the hand – and, as easily, to get lost, so this arrangement was seldom seen in practice.

(5) The nylon combat cargo pack, which was used with the M1941 suspenders and M1961 belt, saw limited use in Vietnam.

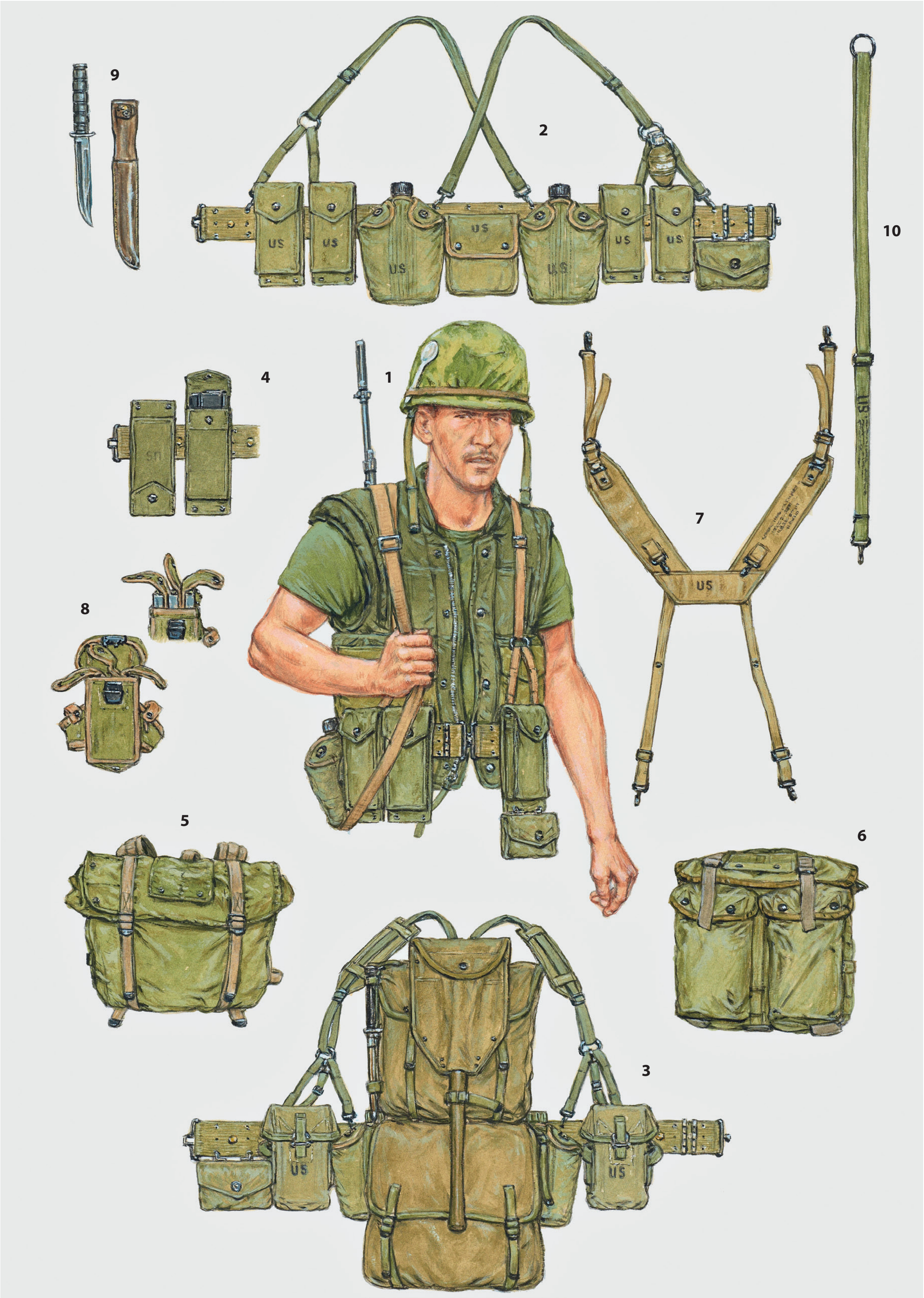
(6) The upper M1967 nylon field pack.

(7) The M1967 nylon combat equipment suspenders, and

(8) The 30-rd magazine small arms case (M16 rifle) both saw limited combat testing in Vietnam, but were used during the evacuation of Saigon and the SS *Mayaguez* incident in April–May 1975. Most Army M1956 web gear items were seen mixed in with Marine gear.

(9) The Mk 2 Ka-Bar combat knife (pronounced "kay-bar") was issued to pistol-armed men, although some riflemen also acquired them.

(10) Single M1941 suspender straps were modified as a trousers belt, with the two short J-hook straps cut off the O-ring.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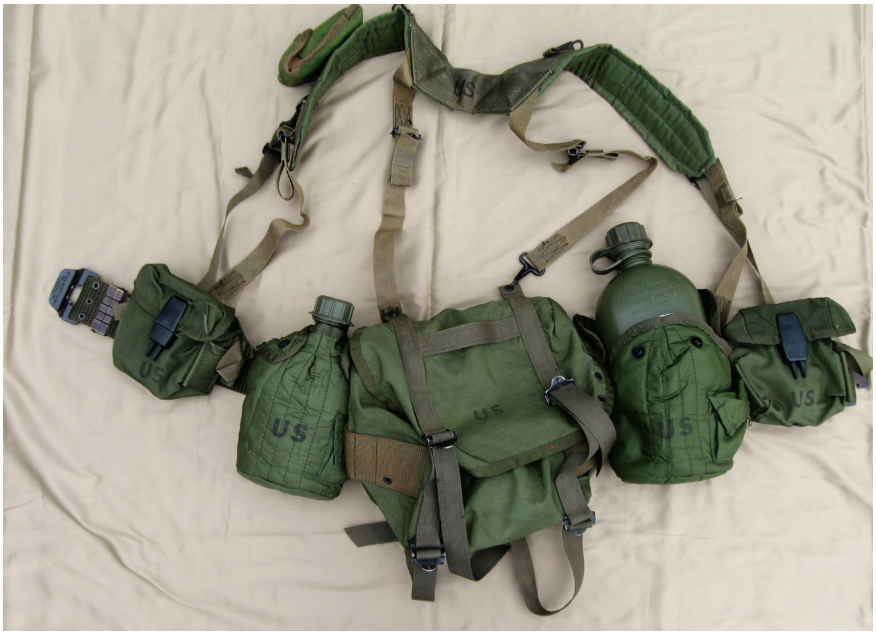
pack high on the shoulders and the sleeping bag carrier could not be used simultaneously.

The **M1956 sleeping bag carrier** (8465-647-0851) or "spaghetti straps" was a double H-strap arrangement to carry the "existence load." A mountain sleeping bag and shelter half could be strapped into it, but these items were not used in Vietnam; instead, a poncho, poncho liner, air mattress, and mosquito net were rolled up. The load was secured by running the straps through loops on the suspenders allowing quick release; carried high on the shoulders, it tended to pull up the front of the belt uncomfortably, so sleeping gear was better packed in a rucksack. An alternate use for carriers was to bundle four to six M72 LAWs (weighing 5.1lb each), for engaging bunkers or barrage-fire at snipers. Four 81mm mortar rounds (9.4lb each) in packing tubes could also be carried in this way, though uncomfortably.

M1967 MODERNIZED LOAD-CARRYING EQUIPMENT

Development of all-nylon web gear began soon after the first US combat troops entered Vietnam in 1965; it was initially designated the Lightweight Load-Carrying Equipment (LLCE), but redesignated the Modernized Load-Carrying Equipment (MLCE). While an innovative use of materials, it was shortsighted in that it was merely a nylon replacement for cotton web gear, with nylon, plastic, and aluminum fittings and Velcro® replacing most of the steel and brass hardware. Fielding began in 1968, but it by no means replaced M1956 gear. It was issued piecemeal as replacements for M1956 components, resulting in mixed sets, and complete M1967 sets were rarely seen. Many soldiers thought the M16 magazine cases felt flimsy. M1967 gear was only issued in Southeast Asia, and M1967 Army and M1967 Marine equipments were different.



A basic set of Army all-nylon M1967 Lightweight Load-Carrying Equipment (LLCE) includes the individual equipment belt with the Davis quick-release buckle; individual equipment belt suspenders; field first aid–unmounted magnetic compass case on the left suspender strap; two small arms ammunition cases, each holding four M16A1 magazines; two water canteen covers with plastic M1961 1qt water canteens; and a combat field pack. (Trey Moore Collection)

The M1967 MLCE was configured the same as the M1956, except that there was no bayonet attachment on the e-tool carrier, the bayonet being carried on the left side of the belt. Some units placed the canteen on the left hip so that a soldier could keep his weapon in his shooting hand and reach the canteen with his left. There was little need for the combat pack and sleeping gear carrier in Vietnam.

The **M1967 individual equipment belt** (8465-935-6815 – Medium, 8465-935-6816 – Large) was almost identical to the M1956 except being made of nylon. Most had Davis quick-release buckles, but some had the "ball-and-T" buckle. The **M1967 individual equipment belt suspenders** (8465-935-6830) were designed so that one size fit all. They were fitted with snaphooks, enabling the pack to be attached to the shoulders without the need for a pack adapter like the M1956.

The **M1967 small arms ammunition case** (8465-935-6780) had a two-prong nylon compression latch and a support strap fitted with a snaphook. It held 4x 20-rd M16 magazines and had side attachments for two grenades. It replaced the M16A1 rifle ammunition small arms case in March 1968. The **M16 30-rd magazine small arms ammunition case** (8465-926-6610) was adopted in January 1969, but saw little if any use in Vietnam. While 30-rd magazines saw very limited issue to MACV-SOG, they were not general issue until after the Vietnam War. Development of a reliable magazine was delayed owing to the M16's deep magazine well designed for straight magazines. Similar to the above short magazine case, it had plastic panels in the front and sides, and held 3x 30-rd magazines plus grenade straps on the sides. The **M1967 field first aid–unmounted magnetic compass case** (8465-935-6814) was similar to the "second pattern" M1956. Made of thin nylon, it offered no padding to protect a compass.

The **M1967 water canteen cover** (8465-860-0256) was similar to the M1956, but of nylon with acrylic pile insulation, and a small Velcro®-secured pocket on the side for a bottle of water purification tablets. The 8mg individual water purification iodine tablets (6850-985-7166) were commonly called "halazone tablets," but WW II chlorine-based halazone tablets had been replaced by iodine-based tablets in 1952. The brown 50-tablet bottle was sometimes carried taped to the plastic strap of the canteen cap. In 1969 the plastic snaps on the cover, which broke, were replaced by metal snaps. There were four vertical stitch lines on the front (seven on all earlier model covers, to reduce chafing by the cup's handle) until 1975, when stitching was eliminated. An inner reinforcing band was added in 1972 to prevent wear by the cup's rim; covers made in 1972–75 had both vertical stitching and the inner band. It was redesignated the LC-1 in 1973 and LC-2 in 1975, all with the same FSN (LC = Load-Carrying).

The **M1967 intrenching tool carrier** (8465-935-6826) for the M1967 collapsible ("tri-fold") e-tool consisted of a nylon pocket in the shape of the e-tool's blade, secured by a two-prong latch and with two slide fasteners on the back; it completely enclosed the folded tool. (An experimental nylon version similar to the M1956 is shown in manuals. It was designed for the combination e-tool and had a bayonet attachment, but was never issued.) Units not issued tri-fold e-tools retained the combination e-tool and M1956 carrier; its robustness made it popular, and the tri-fold e-tool also fitted in it.

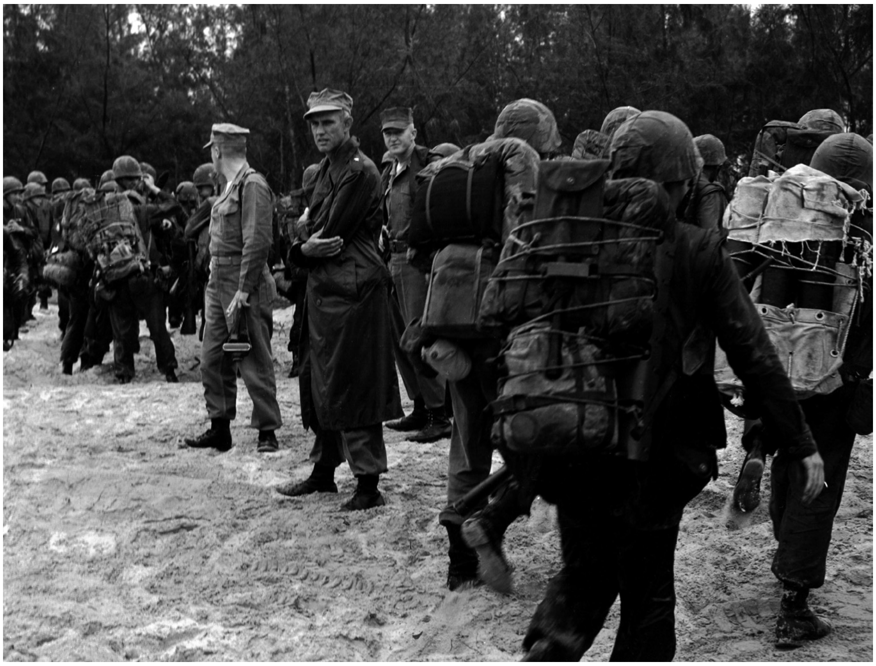
The **M1967 combat field pack** (8465-935-6825) was based on the M1961 but made of nylon, and had tabs on the back to attach to the suspenders behind the shoulders. The M1967 suspenders had integral snaphooks on the shoulders to attach the pack, negating an M1956-type pack adapter. The name-label slot was against the wearer's back. The **M1967 sleeping gear carrier** (8465-935-6813) was a simplified design differing from the M1956, with a 12in x 14in nylon panel and two long securing straps.

(A confusion for collectors is the nylon training field pack (NSN 8465-00-935-6825) similar to the M1967. It lacked upper suspender attachments, and was further simplified, normally having a four-color woodland camouflage waterproofing throat. It was usually issued to troops in training from 1978 to carry a poncho and minimal items in order to make larger backpacks unnecessary.)

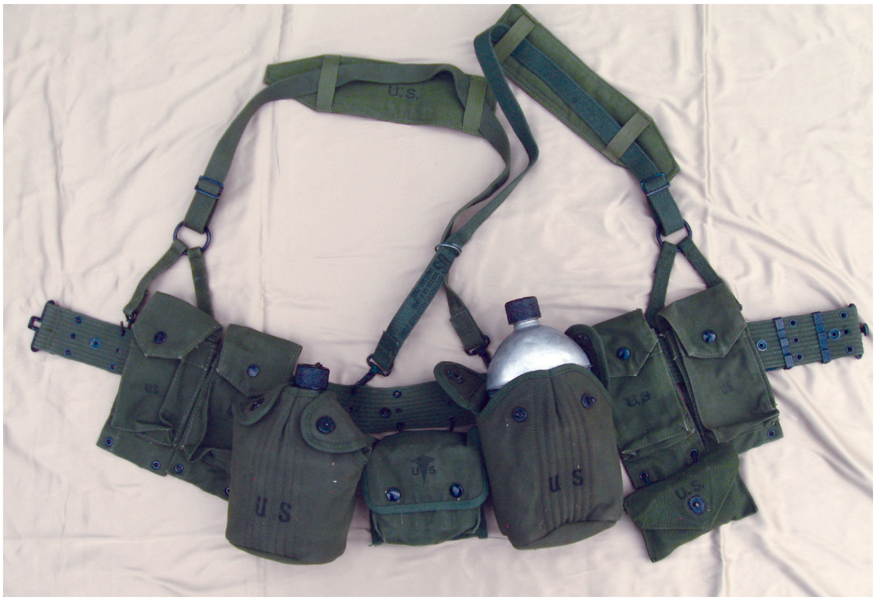
MARINE CORPS EQUIPMENT

The US Marine Corps entered Vietnam with a mixed equipment set consisting of WW II/KW items and M1961 gear accommodating the M14 rifle. This quickly proved inadequate; the existing "782 gear" (so called after Navy Marine Corps Form 782, *QM Receipt for Individual Equipment*) was not sufficiently compatible with the M16A1 rifle issued to Marine infantry and reconnaissance units in May 1967. Army M1956 equipment was introduced and mixed with Marine gear, and as new Army equipment was fielded much of it was also used by the Corps, although they mostly retained their "M1944" field pack. Marine equipment was designed and tested by the Marine Corps Development Center, Quantico, VA; most was colored OD, but some was in WW II tan-khaki.

When first landed in Vietnam some Marines possessed only three M14 magazines, not even the requisite (and inadequate) five. They carried two or three bandoleers, but refilling magazines from clipped ammunition while under fire was problematic, and sufficient magazines were soon issued.



Officers observe a Marine battalion arriving in Vietnam "across the beach." They all carry plywood packboards with "M1944" combat and cargo field packs, bedrolls (shelter half, poncho, and wool blanket – poncho liners were not yet available), and an intrenching tool lashed on. (US Marine Corps History Division)

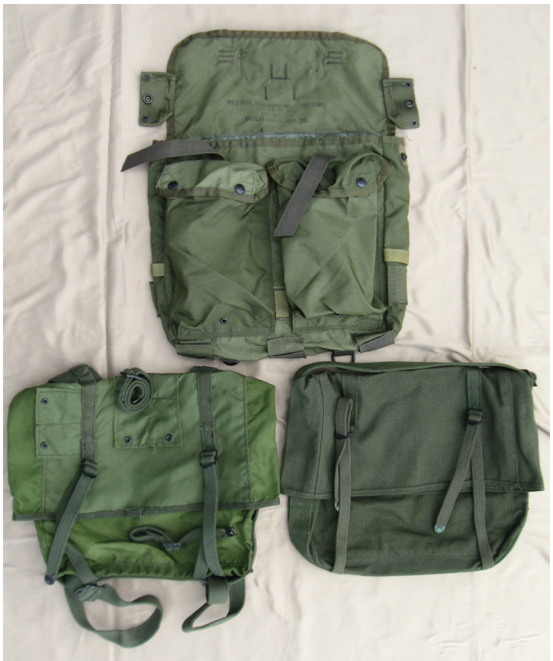


This set of Marine Corps "782 gear" includes the M1961 cartridge belt for the M14 rifle (redesignated M1961 individual equipment belt in 1968); M1941 belt suspenders (the O-ring at the X-back junction was usually removed, as it dug into the back; and they are here fitted with packboard shoulder pads); four M1961 ammunition magazine pockets for the M14 rifle, each holding one magazine, one pocket here with a first aid packet and lensatic compass pouch attached below; two 1qt canteen covers with corrosion-resistant steel canteens; and the individual or "jungle" first aid kit centered below the back of the belt. (Trey Moore Collection)

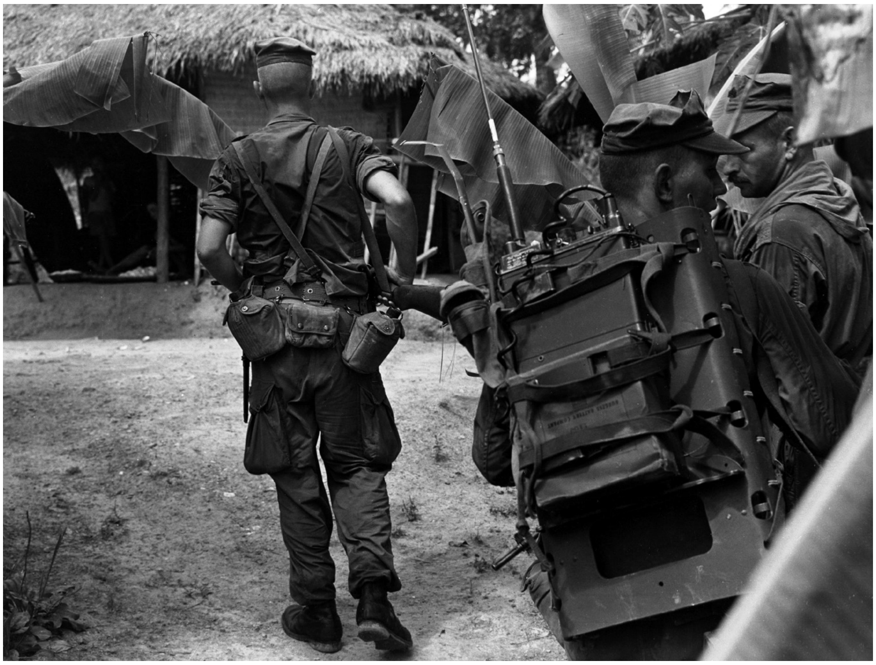
The Marines used a two-component M1941/1944 field pack system. The **"M1944" combat field pack** (8465-882-7966) was a simple one-compartment "haversack." External equipment tabs were provided for the e-tool and bayonet, along with a bedroll strap on top; it had unpadded shoulder straps, and a belt support strap on the bottom. The smaller **"M1944" cargo field pack** (8465-382-7967) – "knapsack" or "leave-behind-pack" – could be attached below the combat pack using a coupling strap, but saw little field use. This "knapsack" could be carried alone by threading the back suspender ends through loops on its back similar to a butt pack. Both packs had simple roll-top openings secured by two straps, which had replaced the original M1941 conventional flap in 1944, and so were colloquially called "M1944."

To replace the cotton version, a **nylon combat field pack** (same FSN as cotton pack) saw limited use from 1968. The pack body was OD nylon, but the shoulder, retaining, and securing straps and edge-binding were cotton webbing. The little-used **nylon combat cargo pack** (8405-823-7622) was similar to the Army's M1967 butt pack, but with snaphooks to fasten it to D-rings on the bottom of the field pack, five eyelets on both edges of the top flap, and no name-label slot.

The **M1941 belt suspenders** (8465-382-7968) were simply two 1in-wide unpadded adjustable web straps, with belt snaphooks on the back ends, and O-rings on the front ends from which two short straps attached to the belt eyelets by J-hooks. The two shoulder straps were not physically connected but simply worn crossed as X-back suspenders. They were uncomfortable and gave poor weight distribution; shoulder-strap pads from the plywood packboard (8465-244-0737) were



Three types of Marine Corps packs. (Top) The nylon combat field pack, which partly replaced the "M1944 haversack." (Bottom left) The nylon combat cargo pack was attached to the belt, to be carried as a butt pack by itself, or below the nylon combat field pack as a "knapsack" or "leave-behind pack." (Bottom right) "M1944" combat field pack or "haversack." (Trey Moore Collection)



This USMC patrol cautiously approaching a deserted village provide a good view of an AN/PRC-25 radio secured to a plywood packboard, by means of the three 59in-long Type 1 quick-release straps issued with each packboard. The marine to the left wears M1944 belt suspenders with the rear O-ring removed as usual, two 1qt canteen covers with stainless steel canteens, and an individual first aid kit. His "drive-on" or "sweat" rag is made from a triangular bandage. (US Marine Corps History Division)

sometimes slipped on. The simplified 1967 **field pack suspenders** (same FSN) had only one front attachment strap with a snaphook; paired front support straps were unnecessary owing to the support strap on Army M1956 ammo pouches. Suspender straps were often modified as trousers belts.

The improved **M1967 nylon field pack** (8465-860-0337) was larger than earlier models and featured two external pockets, offering one-third more cargo capacity. It and the **M1967 nylon combat equipment suspenders** (8465-078-4581), an H-harness design, were approved in 1971, but did not see Vietnam service other than field testing. Production markings included "(USMC)," differentiating them from Army M1967 gear.

The cotton **M1961 cartridge belt for M14 rifle** (8465-823-6937 – Medium; 8465-823-6938 – Large) was designed to accommodate M14 magazine pockets. In 1968, it was redesignated "M1961 individual equipment belt" owing to the issue of the M16A1. The cotton "web belt" was made with both horizontal and vertical wefts, was adjustable only on the right end, and had a "T-and-slot" buckle. Besides the eyelets on the upper and lower edges and centerline adjustment eyelets, there were 11–15 centerline female snaps for securing magazine pockets.

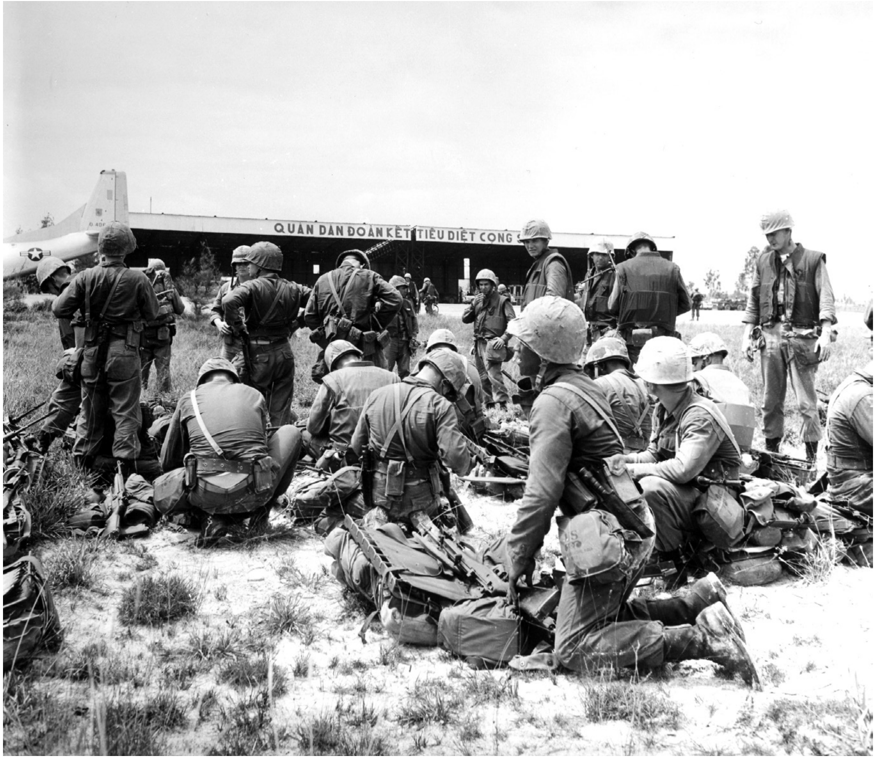
The cotton **M1961 ammunition magazine pocket for M14 rifle** (8456-823-6936) held one 20-rd magazine, with a snap-secured flap. On the canvas back loop were two male snaps, and two eyelets on the bottom edge for double-hook attachments. The upper snap positioned the pocket on the belt with the opening at the top, and the lower positioned its opening downward; this allowed the magazine to drop into a marine's hand, but made accidental opening likely when crawling, so it was seldom carried in this manner. In late 1964 the pocket was deepened by a ¾in. Four pockets were normal issue; M14 automatic riflemen carried up to nine, with two or three ammunition-clip bandoleers. As M16s were issued the pockets were replaced with Army M1956 M14 and M16 rifle magazine cases. Marines often wore M3 bandoleers with seven M16 magazines around their waist instead.

The Marines requested the Army to develop a 30-rd magazine case for the M16A1 compatible with its M1967 gear, and the **30-rd magazine small arms case (M16 rifle)** (8465-464-2084) was standardized in January 1972. It was based on the Army M16 30-rd magazine case, but had two dividers and three snap-secured flaps under the lid to protect and prevent the loss of magazines if the lid was left open (this design proved cumbersome). It had side pockets for M67 grenades rather than snap-straps and lever-loops. Marines used these cases during the April 1975 evacuation of Saigon and the SS *Mayaguez* incident soon afterwards.

The **first aid packet and lensatic compass pouch** (8465-261-4999) dated from WW II, a rectangular pouch with a LTD fastener and a double-hook. The **individual first aid kit** (6545-823-8165) or “jungle first aid kit” consisted of a canvas “empty first aid case” (6545-912-0625) with five compartments; it was issued to marines in the field and typically worn on the belt’s back center. A nylon version with slide-keepers (6545-094-8412) was fielded, but little seen in Vietnam; lacking compartment dividers, it came with an OD plastic **insert box** (6545-094-6136) with a snap-on waterproof cap, containing a field dressing, eye dressing, triangular bandage, 10x adhesive bandages, antiseptic, foot powder, chap-stick, and water purification tablets.

The **1qt canteen cover** (7350-379-2602) was similar to the Army’s M1910, with LTD fasteners on the flaps and a double-hook on the back. The Marines used both plastic and metal canteens.

The **M1943 intrenching tool carrier** (8465-281-4993) was an Army WW II design. It had no bayonet attachment, an LTD fastener on the flap, and a double-hook on the back that could be fitted in one of three positions. They were also designated “combination intrenching tool carriers,” and were issued to the Army as a substitute for the M1956 carrier.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Some of these marines, packing their gear prior to boarding an Air Force transport, wear only one M1944 suspender strap; it is not known if this was by preference, or because of shortages. As can be seen, the positioning of M1961 magazine pockets was erratic, and several men carry Mk 2 Ka-Bar combat knives. These were supposedly issued only to men armed with pistols (officers, platoon sergeants and higher grade NCOs, grenadiers, machine gunners, and mortar gunners). While it was believed that riflemen did not need them since they had bayonets, it was not uncommon to acquire them either through unit issue or private purchase. (US Marine Corps History Division)

Troops of the 2nd Bn, 4th Marines, Marine Amphibious Unit 31 conducted one of the final US ground operations in Southeast Asia on April 12, 1975: Operation "Eagle Pull," the evacuation of Phnom Penh, Cambodia. On the marine's shoulder at lower right can be seen the bulky 30-rd magazine small arms case for the M16A1 rifle, which held three magazines. (US Marine Corps History Division)

ADDITIONAL AMERICAN EQUIPMENT ITEMS

These included a variety of specialized equipment for carrying ammunition and supplies, tools, shelter, and day-to-day necessities. Most of these items were used by both the Army and Marines, and also by the ARVN and other Free World forces.

US supplementary web equipment: magazine and munition carriers

The **.45-caliber magazine ammunition pocket** (8465-782-2239) was based on the M1923 used through the KW, but had two slide-keepers instead of a belt loop and snap. With two cells for 7-rd M1911A1 pistol magazines, it was secured by a flap with an LTD. It was normally attached to the left front of the belt. Some troops lacked pistol magazine pouches, but used a universal ammunition pouch to hold two pistol magazines and cleaning gear.

The **three-pocket submachine gun magazine carrier** (8465-577-4915) had three flapped and snap-closed pockets, and a wide belt loop on the back. Holding three 30-rd magazines for the M1, M1A1, and M3A1 SMGs, it was mainly used by the ARVN.

The **ammunition magazine pocket with shoulder strap** (8465-705-2438) was mainly used by armored vehicle crews as on-vehicle equipment. This rectangular canvas pouch had a single LTD-secured flap and a belt loop; the adjustable shoulder strap was non-detachable. It held six 30-rd M3A1 "grease gun" magazines, but there were no internal dividers, causing magazines to rattle. A nylon version was introduced in 1972, but probably did not see Vietnam service.

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WEAPONS-RELATED EQUIPMENT

(1) This grenadier armed with the M79 grenade launcher carries 24x 40mm rounds in his "grenade vest;" the two outer pockets in each bottom row of six are obscured here. The upper two pairs of pockets are the same length as the others; the longer pockets for pyrotechnic cartridges did not appear until 1972. He is additionally armed with a .45cal M1911A1 pistol in an M1916 hip holster, with three 7-rd magazines. Grenade arming pins are carried under the helmet camo band, in case he needs to disarm grenade-based booby traps.

(2a) The 40mm grenade bandoleer carried six rounds in white plastic holders. Sometimes the straps were cut short, the connecting fabric between the two pockets was cut off, and the pockets were tied to rucksacks **(2b)**.

(3) An M18A1 Claymore mine and accessories were carried in the two-pocket M7 bandoleer ("Claymore bag"). Optionally, this could also be used to carry 16x M16 magazines, 20x 40mm grenades, or 8x hand grenades.

(4) The 100-rd 7.62mm M60 MG belt was issued in a cardboard carton in an M4 one-pocket bandoleer; two of these came in an M19A1 "small ammo can." Strapped to rucksacks, the watertight ammo cans were also used to carry personal items.

(5) The .45cal magazine ammunition pocket held two 7-rd M1911A1 pistol magazines.

(6) The three-pocket submachine gun magazine carrier held 30-rd magazines for the .45cal M1 and M1A1 Thompson and M3A1 "grease gun."

(7) The ammunition magazine pocket with shoulder strap held six M3A1 SMG magazines as on-vehicle equipment aboard armored vehicles.

(8) The shotgun ammunition pouch, holding 12x 12-gauge brass shotshells in internal loops.

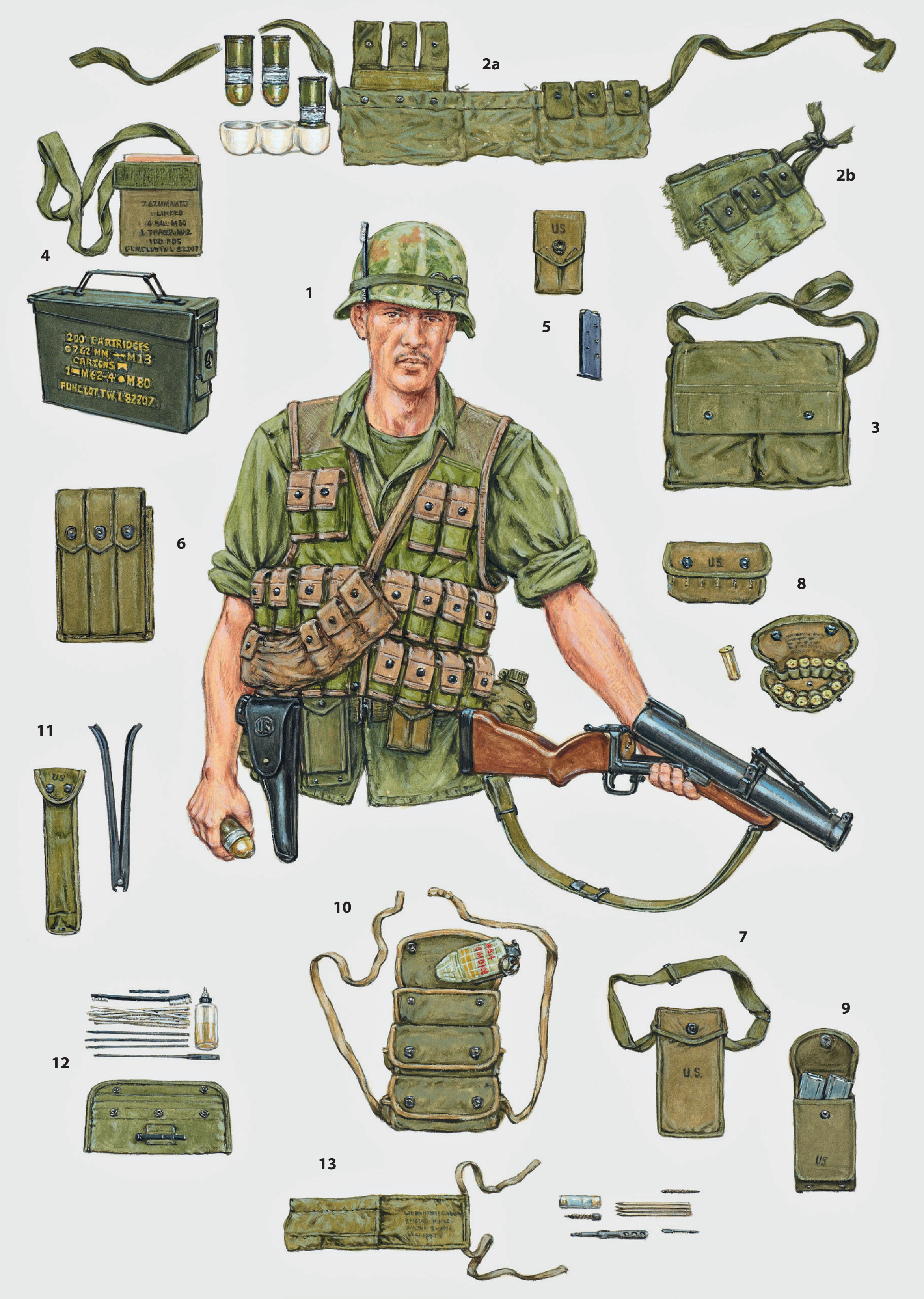
(9) The 30-rd carbine magazine pocket held four M2 carbine magazines.

(10) The three-pocket grenade carrier held three pyrotechnic grenades – an M34 WP smoke grenade is illustrated – but each pocket could hold two M67 "baseball grenades."

(11) The "third pattern" carrying case for the M16 rifle's XM3 "clothes pin" bipod.

(12) The bipod case was used alongside this M16 rifle maintenance equipment kit.

(13) The M14E2 small arms equipment case was issued with the M14E2/A1 automatic rifle, but was sometimes used for M16 rifle cleaning equipment.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2b
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7.62 MM NATO
LINKED
4 BALL M80
1 TRACER M62
100 RDS
200 CARTRIDGES
7.62 MM. M13
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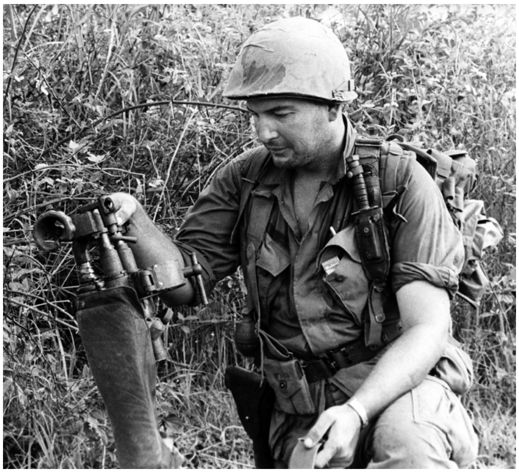


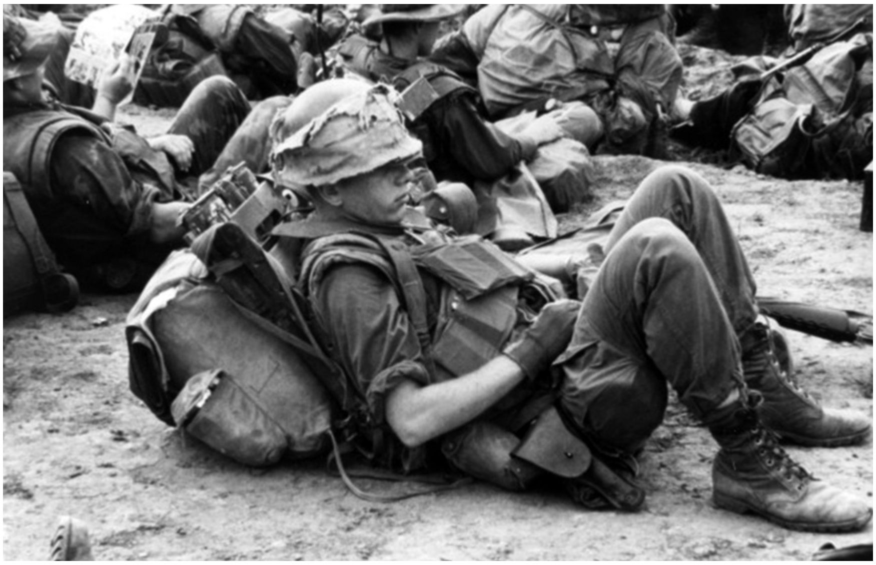
A Marine officer examines a damaged NVA 82mm mortar bipod. On his left suspender strap an Air Force 5in survival knife is carried in a leather scabbard with an integral pocket for a small sharpening stone; this knife was easily acquired and widely used. On his belt are a .45cal M1911A1 pistol in an M1916 black leather hip holster, and either a .45cal magazine ammunition pocket or possibly an old M1923 pistol magazine pocket (with web belt loop rather than slide-keepers); both types held two 7-rd magazines. (US Marine Corps History Division)

Limited use was made of the **shotgun ammunition pouch** (8465-261-8944), a rectangular canvas pouch with two LTD fasteners securing the front flap and two web belt loops on the back. It held twelve 12-gauge shotshells in web loops sewn to the front and back inside. These pouches provided two or three reloads for riot-type shotguns with 4- to 5-rd tubular magazines. "Riot guns" were mainly used by MPs guarding prisoners; they did see limited combat use, but the fact that they had to be reloaded one round at a time was problematic. Infantrymen with shotguns usually used M14 rifle ammo pouches.

The **30-rd carbine magazine pocket** (8465-254-2771) had a snap-closed top flap and two web belt loops on the back. It held four 30-rd M2 carbine "banana magazines;" inside on the back panel were two one-magazine slots, and two more fitted into the front part of the pocket. There were two eyelets on the bottom edge for double-hook attachments. This item was mainly used by the ARVN and RF/PF.

The **three-pocket grenade carrier** (8465-261-5001) consisted of three pockets each secured by a flap with two LTD fasteners, with a double-hook for belt attachment, and two leg straps. Two M67 grenades fitted into each pocket; it made grenades readily accessible, protected them from rain and dirt, and prevented their loss. It was mostly used by the Marines and little by the Army. (Neither the smaller earlier version with one LTD fastener per pocket nor the old Marine two-pocket carrier were used in Vietnam.)

The **M1937 BAR magazine belt** (74-B-240) – also used by the ARVN and ROK – consisted of two sections each with three LTD-secured flapped pockets, and a back connecting belt. Each pocket held 2x 20-rd magazines. Usually only eight magazines (160 rds) were carried instead of 12 to avoid excessive weight, with cleaning gear and personal items in the other two pockets. The "B-A-R belt" was sought after by SF, MIKE Forces, and recon teams, since four 20-rd M16/XM177 magazines fitted in each pocket (= 24



With rifle magazines in two seven-pocket M3 bandoleers slung across his chest, this marine leans back on a plywood packboard with a tropical rucksack attached. Vertically stowed between the packboard and the rucksack are three M72 LAWs. Besides his M16A1 rifle he carries an M1911A1 pistol in an M1916 hip holster. As often seen, his helmet cover got torn when he forced his way through thorny brush. (US Marine Corps History Division)

Bandoleers

Ammunition for a number of weapons was provided in cheap cotton bandoleers, which came packed in ammunition cans. ("Bandoleer" is the US spelling, "bandolier" British and Commonwealth.) They were of widely varied OD shades. On multi-pocket bandoleers one pocket was marked, e.g., the M3 bandoleer with "5.56MM BALL M193 10 RD CLIPS" and the lot number. Bandoleers for rifles were all essentially the same, with six (or seven for the M16) envelope pockets. A web carrying strap could be adjusted by knotting it or shortening it with an issued black safety pin. One or two clips filled each pocket, protected by cardboard sleeves. M2 carbine, M14, and M16 charging clips were accompanied by disposable magazine fillers ("spoons"), that were fitted to the back of the magazine and cartridges stripped in. M14 magazines could also be loaded from charger clips while in the rifle.

M1 bandoleer (M1 rifle)	6x 8-rd clips in six pockets (48 rds)
M1 bandoleer (M2 carbine)	12x 10-rd clips in six pockets (120 rds)
M2 bandoleer (M14 rifle)	12x 5-rd clips in six pockets (60 rds) (1305-965-0834)
M3 bandoleer (M16 rifle)	14x 10-rd clips, or 7x 20-rd magazines, in seven pockets (140 rds) (1305-924-3088)
M4 bandoleer (M60 MG)	1x 100-rd belt & carton in one pocket (1305-079-3579)
40mm grenade bandoleer	6 rds in two pockets (1310-828-2926)
M7 Claymore bandoleer	1x mine & accessories in two pockets
AUST/Mk I bandolier (L1A1 rifle)	10x 5-rd clips in five pockets (50 rds)

Soldiers commonly used most of their **M3 bandoleers** to carry seven 20-rd M16 mags rather than clipped ammunition, and the ARVN did the same with M1 bandoleers. Sometimes grenades or 40mm rounds were alternatively carried in the M3's pockets.

M60 MG 100-rd disintegrating metallic linked belts (four ball rds to one tracer) were issued in two cartons in an M19A1 ammo can, each carton in a rectangular **M4 bandoleer.** Multiple belts could be linked together end-to-end while the gun fired, as both ends of the belt were accessible in the carton. A web carrying strap was provided, and there was a heavy web band around the top of the bag to be attached to the gun's left side.

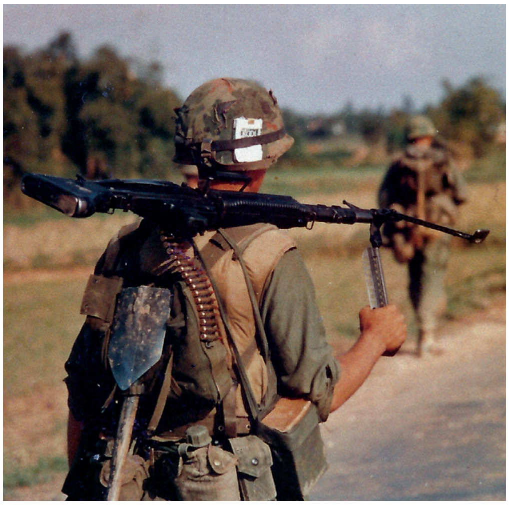
40mm grenades were issued in OD or tan two-pocket bandoleers, three rounds per pocket. There was a snap-secured flap for each grenade, which were held in three-cup white plastic supports ("egg carton cups") – grenades easily fell out. A cloth panel linked the two pockets, and there was a two-piece web carrying strap that was knotted at the desired length. Some grenadiers cut off the cloth panel and all but a few inches of the straps, and tied 2–6 three-grenade pockets together in bundles to hang on rucksacks.

M18A1 Claymore mines were issued in **M7 bandoleers** ("Claymore bags") with a carrying strap, the two pockets secured by a large flap with two snaps. A green fabric instruction sheet sewn inside was torn out when it was used for other purposes. One pocket held the mine, and the other an M57 firing device ("clacker"), 100ft of M4 firing wire and a blasting cap on a spool, and one M40 test set per six mines. The fabric was heavier than in other disposable bandoleers, so the M7 was often used to carry 16x M16 magazines (8x stacked flat in each pocket), 20x 40mm grenades, 8x hand grenades, or personal items. There was a danger of ammunition falling out if the flap was not secured.

The **AUST/Mk I bandolier** held ten 7.62mm L1A1 rifle charging clips in five pockets secured by six green snaps, on a web strap with ring adjusters. It was made of heavier JG fabric than US bandoleers. An L1A1 magazine-charging adapter was required to load a magazine from clips.

mags, 480 rds). However, one or two pockets might hold three grenades or air/ground marker aids, and some users cut off one of the rear pockets so a canteen could be attached. (The author used one as an in-camp "alert belt," with 20x M16 mags in five pockets and a field dressing in each, and three M67 grenades in another pocket; it was fitted with M1956 suspenders with M127A1 white star parachute "pop-ups" breakaway-taped to the shoulder straps – total weight 22lb 8oz.)

The first 1966 trials batch of **M79 grenade carrier vests** (8405-NIX-6531-series, provided in Small and Large sizes) were in fact generally too small for



This marine, with a pack of Kool cigarettes in his helmet band, carries a 7.62mm M60 machine gun with an approximately 25-rd belt section loaded; at his side hangs an M4 bandoleer containing a 100-rd belt in a carton. A short belt was habitually loaded in the gun for easier handling when going into a hasty firing position; the assistant gunner would then attach a 100-rd belt to the end of it as the gunner began firing. Between the bandoleer and the canteen is an M1961 pocket for an M14 rifle magazine, which in this case may hold pistol magazines or simply personal items. The intrenching tool is an M1943, lacking the M1951 combination intrenching tool's folding pick. (US Marine Corps History Division)

Americans and were mostly issued to the ARVN. They had two three-grenade pockets one above the other on each side of the front panel, and two more on the small of the back, ineffectively closed by narrow Velcro® straps – 18 rounds total. The pockets required the plastic "egg cups" from the grenade bandoleer to retain grenades, and the fine mesh used for the front and back was too flimsy.

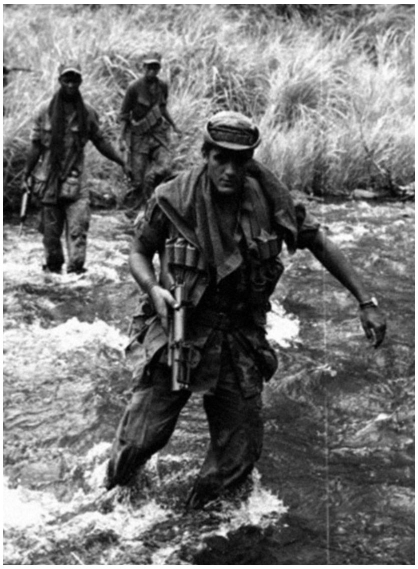
An improved version was developed and sent to Vietnam in late 1968. The **grenade carrying vest** (8415-146-1667 – Small, up to 38in chest; 8415-146-1668 – Medium, 39–42in; 8415-141-0927 – Large, 53in and over) was made of OG-106 nylon; the back panel and shoulders were mesh and the front panels duck. On each front panel were two grenade pockets below the shoulders, four below those, and six near the bottom. The 24 pockets were secured by web straps with snaps. In 1972 the top pockets were deepened for longer pyrotechnic cartridges, but few of these saw Vietnam service.

Weapon accessory cases

The **small arms accessory case** (1010-474-5462) was a rectangular pocket with a one-snap end flap. On the back was an attachment strap with a snap at the bottom end to secure it to the side of an ammunition case or suspenders, but it was commonly carried in the rucksack. Made of OD duck or grayish-green vinyl-coated nylon, it held an M79 bore brush with thong, a plastic oil tube, combination tool, and cleaning brush.

The M16's XM3 "clothes pin bipod" (1005-992-6676) was intended to be issued to each man, but few had any use for this inconvenient device, which could not be folded out of the way when on the rifle. All canvas **bipod carrying case** versions were an elongated pouch with a single slide-keeper. The "first pattern" cotton case had a slot for the disassembled four-piece cleaning rod secured by a snapped tab, and no bipod flap. The "second pattern" (1005-999-2430) had a flap secured by two snaps, an M11 cleaning rod slot, and a large zippered pocket for cleaning items. The "third pattern" (1005-283-9439) was made of nylon and lacked cleaning gear accommodation, being used alongside the M16 maintenance kit (below).

The 1968 **M16 rifle maintenance equipment kit** (1005-562-7393 – complete; 8465-781-9564 – case only) held cleaning gear in a flat, two-compartment, envelope-style nylon case. The internal compartments were sealed by Velcro® and further secured by a flap with three snaps. It had a single slide-keeper.



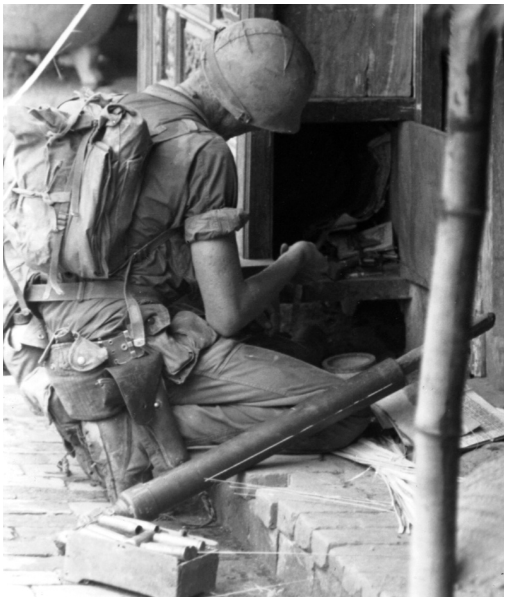
The grenadier of a recon patrol crossing a stream wears the early developmental M79 grenade carrier vest; too small for most Americans even in its "large" model, it was mostly issued to the ARVN. This 18-round vest had four three-grenade pockets on the front and two on the lower back; many grenadiers preferred canteen covers and Claymore bags for carrying 40mm rounds. An olive drab towel is draped over his shoulders as a "drive-on rag." (US Marine Corps History Division)

The **M14E2 small arms maintenance equipment case** (8465-926-6768) carried the cleaning rod, combination tool/handle, chamber brush, and oiler for the M14E2/A1 automatic rifle, with four pockets and a fold-over tie flap.

Holsters and mapcase

The **M1916 hip pistol holster** (1095-592-6491, or 1005-673-7975 after November 1972) for the .45cal M1911A1 pistol had a protective flap secured by a bronze stud. On the back were a double-hook and belt slits; it was usually attached to the right side. The **M7 shoulder pistol holster** (1095-973-2353, or 1005-561-2003 after November 1972 – "tanker holster") had an adjustable two-piece shoulder strap and was secured by an LTD fastener-strap; it was worn on the left chest, and from the bottom end a snap-strap loop secured it to the trousers belt. Both holsters were usually of rigid black leather (though some were brown or tan) with an embossed oval-encircled "US" on the flap.

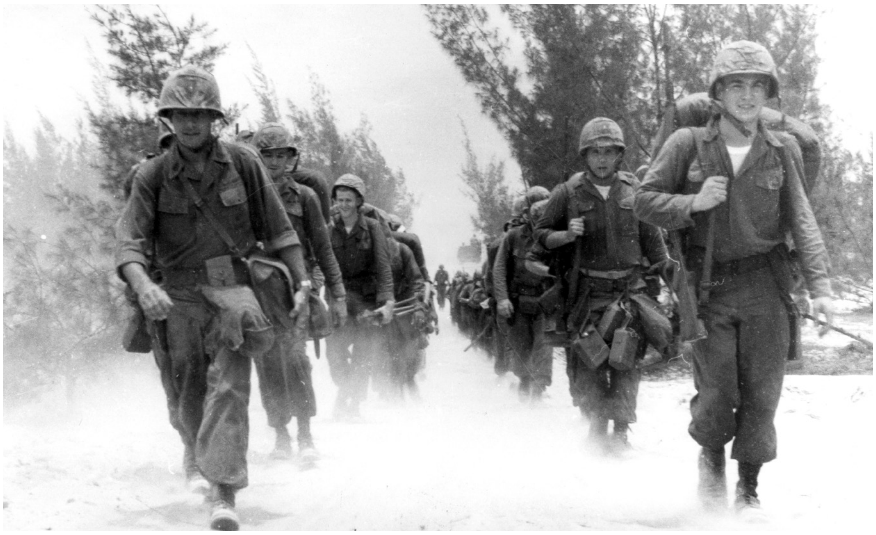
The **map and photograph case** (8460-368-4281) was a 10½in x 12in canvas pouch secured by a large two-snap flap covering six pencil/pen slots and two ruler pockets. On the back were two D-rings with a narrow shoulder carrying strap. Fielded in the late 1950s, it differed slightly from the M1938 dispatch case (24-C-535) then still in use.



A pistol-armed mortar crewman searches a hut during a village sweep; he carries a Marine Corps "M1944" combat field pack with a folded poncho under the flap. The barrel of his 60mm M19 mortar rests on the ground, the cleaning staff protruding from the barrel; the thin white line on the barrel is an auxiliary sighting line in case the optical sight is lost or damaged. The marine is examining a cabinet for items of intelligence value; in the foreground, note the box containing expended .50cal cartridges, probably collected by villagers to sell to scrap-metal dealers. (US Marine Corps History Division)

US individual field equipment: canteens

One-quart (32oz, 0.94 liter) canteens were all of the same basic design, with a kidney-shaped cross-section and concave back. The OD (shades varied) rigid polyethylene **M1961 1qt water canteen** (8465-889-3744) or "plastic canteen" was standardized in 1962; it proved durable, reduced weight, and eliminated metallic noises. The cap and securing strap were also plastic. The canteen was marked "FOR WATER ONLY/DO NOT APPLY CANTEEN/TO OPEN FLAME OR/BURNER PLATES."



The lead marine in the left-hand file is a platoon sergeant, who, along with the platoon commander, was armed only with a .45cal M1911A1 pistol and a Mk 2 Ka-Bar combat knife. He carries a well-filled map and photograph case on his left hip. The second marine in the right file carries M4 bandoleers with 100-rd belt cartons for the M60 machine gun. (US Marine Corps History Division)

Metal 1qt canteens remained in use mostly in the States, but they were seen in Vietnam. The former M1910 aluminum canteen, renamed with the "M1910" deleted, and the corrosion-resistant stainless steel canteen of 1942, had black Bakelite caps secured by chains. Both were designated 8465-191-0366, and were withdrawn in 1972.

The **corrosion resistant steel canteen cup** (8465-242-7843), made of dull-finished stainless steel and introduced in 1943, was of the same design as the M1910 cup, but had a flared lip instead of the former rolled edge, to prevent burning of the lips; it was designed for the canteen to nest inside it. It had a hinged L-shaped flat steel handle that folded under the cup, with a sliding latch locking it in place when opened; cups with wire handles are post-1974. Filled to the brim, it held 24oz (¾qt, 0.70 liter).

Attempts to provide a 2qt (64oz, 1.88 liter) canteen were generally unsatisfactory. There were several versions of the **2qt capacity collapsible canteen cover and bladder** based on an unsuccessful WW II design. The bladder was made of translucent vinyl, with the same black Bakelite screw-on cap as 1qt metal canteens. The 1962 "trials version" was requested by USSF, designated 8465-J22-0003 ("J" = Japanese manufactured). The 2qt bladder's production version was 8465-889-3770 and remained unchanged. The 1962 cover's "trial version" was 8465-J22-0002; tested in Vietnam, it was a square-shaped nylon cover with rounded corners and a top opening with an LTD-fastened flap. An adjustable shoulder strap was sewn to the upper

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RIFLEMAN, 25th INFANTRY DIVISION, 1969

(1) Infantrymen in the "boonies" rigged their gear very differently from what "the book" (FM 21-15) prescribed. One of the most common configurations was the lightweight rucksack with aluminum frame, and absolutely no load-bearing equipment – no belt, suspenders, ammo cases, first aid pouch, etc.; everything was carried in or on the "ruck."

A variety of small items (seldom more than two or three at a time) were carried under the helmet camo band: LSA weapon lubricating oil, mosquito repellent; C-rat cigarette pack, match book, C-rat spoon, P-38 "John Wayne" can-opener; grenade arming pins, an M16A1 magazine or a few loose cartridges – even a deck of playing cards. This rifleman carries C-rat toilet paper, and a 2oz bottle of Tabasco sauce to liven up his chow. Various graffiti were often marked on the camo cover itself.

Typically carried inside the ruck were C-rats, dry socks, rain jacket or sleeping sweater (seasonal), toilet kit, platoon munitions (Claymore, trip flares, pop-ups, etc.), and perhaps a brick-sized radio battery. Externally, the air mattress and poncho liner are wrapped in a poncho. He carries an M19A1 ammo can for personal items, an M72 LAW, two 1qt canteens clipped to a snaplink, a 2qt collapsible water canteen, a "chow sock" holding several C-rat cans, and three M18 colored smoke grenades. Yellow and violet smoke were mostly used for A/G marking; red for danger, or signaling that a unit was in contact; green was little used owing to poor contrast with the vivid vegetation, but it was found to drive off swarming bees.

(2) Seven 20-rd M16 magazines were carried in each of two to three M3 bandoleers, plus one or two more bandoleers with ammo in 10-rd stripper clips – 140 rds per bandoleer, with a magazine filler "spoon." Usually one bandoleer was tied around the waist and the others slung across the chest and/or on the ruck (omitted here, for clarity). Tear-open vinyl envelopes (left) were available to protect magazines from rain and when wading streams. Intended to be discarded, they were printed with a Vietnamese-language appeal to the Viet Cong to surrender; this loosely translated as, "If you surrender (*Chieu Hoi*) we will help you meet with your parents, wife and children. Live happily and peacefully with the free people of Vietnam."

(3) The failed "trials version" 2qt collapsible canteen cover and bladder gave way to the marginally better "first and second pattern" 2qt capacity collapsible canteens.

(4) The "second pattern" 2qt capacity collapsible canteen; bladder canteens were difficult to fill.

(5) The "first pattern" vinyl-coated 2qt collapsible water canteen cover with sling was a better design, but was still awkward to carry, especially on the belt.

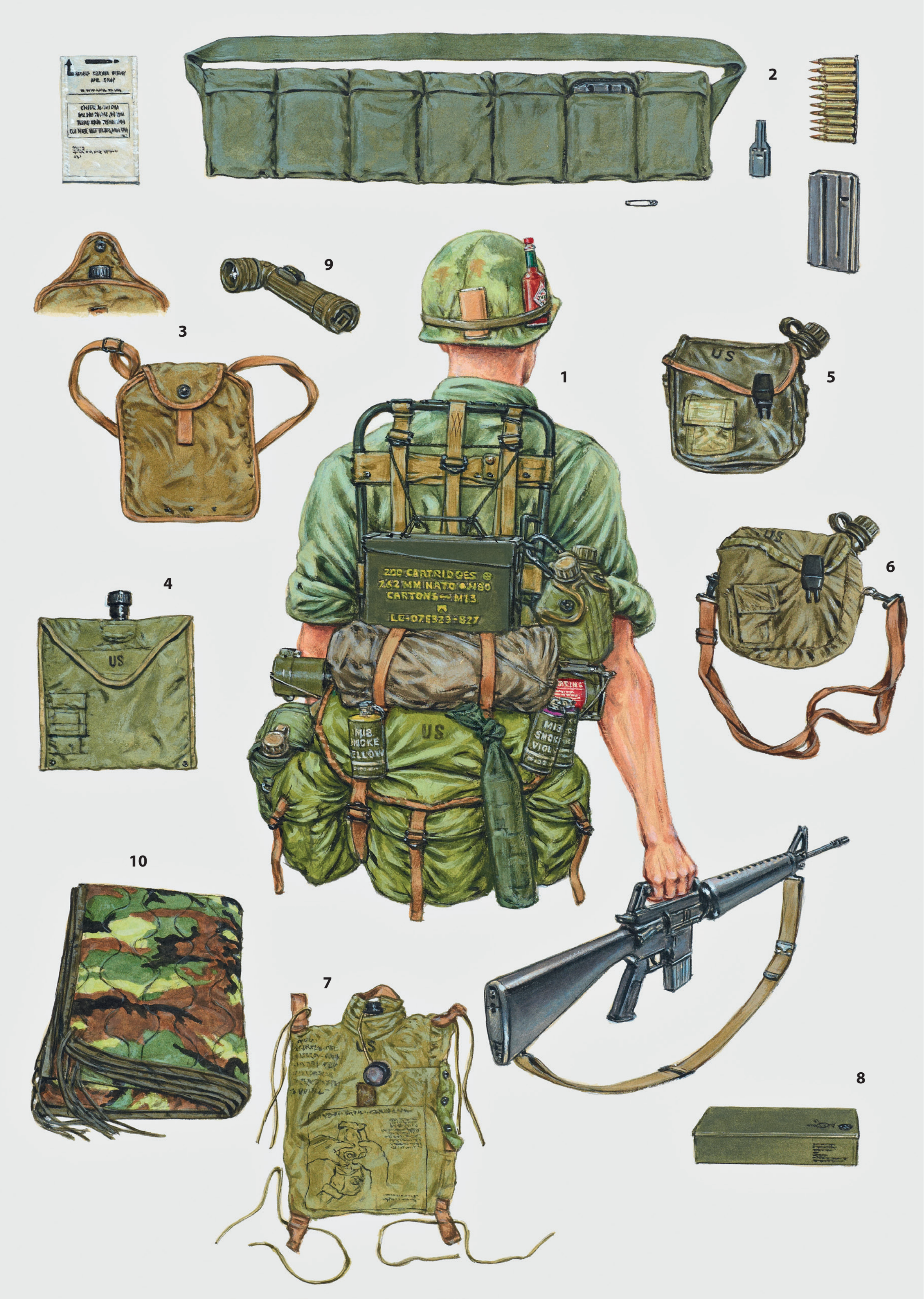
(6) The "second pattern" 2qt collapsible water canteen cover had an all-nylon body.

(7) The 5qt collapsible canteen/flotation bladder assembly was little used in either role, being too heavy when filled, but when inflated with air it made a fairly good pillow.

(8) Spare BA-386 batteries for the AN/PRC-25 or -77 radio were carried by platoon members. The "bat" weighed just under 4lb 2oz.

(9) The plastic MX-991/U or "right-angle" flashlight (to marines, "moonbeam") was used, besides night illumination, for marking routes or danger areas, A/G position marking, and signaling.

(10) The poncho liner proved to be an extremely popular piece of sleeping gear, here in the most common four-color ERDL pattern.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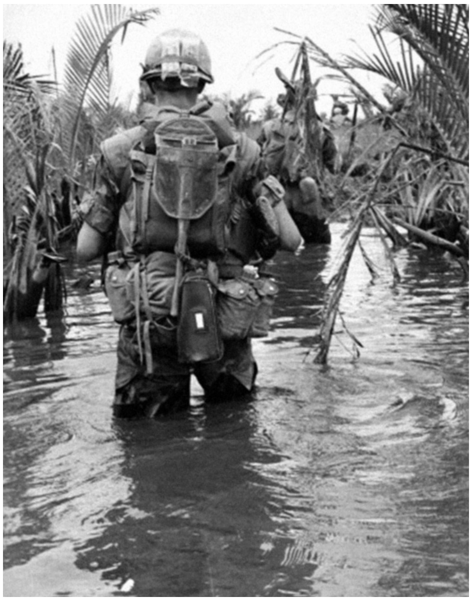


This marine carries an "M1944" combat field pack with what appears to be an M1961 "ass" pack, an M1943 intrenching tool carrier with M1951 combination intrenching tool, and M1956 canteen covers with M1961 plastic canteens. A civilian-style leather "Dopp kit" or toilet kit hangs on the ass pack. Two field dressings are tucked under the helmet camo band; it was common for men to carry more than the prescribed single dressing. (US Marine Corps History Division)

corners, with a wide reinforcing band at top back. The 1963 "first pattern" production version covers (8465-889-3769 – later revisions retained this FSN) had a narrower top back band. It was too difficult to remove the bladder through the small opening, and the strap was a poor means of carriage. The 1965 "second pattern" cover had a full-width top opening flap secured by Velcro®, with an exposed cap, squared corners, and two slide-fasteners on the back replacing the strap. A further 1966 refinement added a pocket for a bottle of water purification tablets on the left front. This version proved awkward to carry on a belt, and marginal on the rucksack. Leaking bladders were discarded, and it was found that the NVA/VC repaired them to transport whole blood collected from support troops prior to an action. Their issue was halted.

A new 2qt canteen (8465-927-7484) or "jungle canteen" was made of semi-rigid OD plastic using the same cap and strap as the plastic 1qt. Prototype testing in Vietnam began in 1965 and standardization in 1969. The **2qt collapsible water canteen cover with sling** (8465-927-7485) was a rectangular acrylic, pile-lined pouch. The lid was secured by a plastic clip; it had two slide-fasteners on the back, a narrow adjustable sling (usually discarded) attached to D-rings, and a purification tablet bottle pocket. The 1966 "first pattern" was made of vinyl-coated cotton duck, while the 1968 "second pattern" was all nylon.

The **5qt collapsible canteen/flotation bladder assembly** (8465-141-0924) was fielded in 1969. The nylon cover (8465-141-0837) was a bag with a cap opening in the top along with a cloth tubular collar to funnel water into the cap; a three-snap opening on the side seam to remove the bladder (8465-141-0835); tie-cords on the corners; and a purification tablet bottle pocket. Instructions were printed on both sides. Empty, it could be folded to stow in a trousers cargo pocket. The 5qt (160oz, 4.7 liter) bladder was clear plastic including the cap. Orally inflated canteens were used as flotation devices; one was sufficient to keep a man buoyant, but an additional one was required for every 10lb of non-buoyant equipment. They were commonly used as pillows.

Tools, etc.

The **M1951 combination intrenching tool** (5120-289-0540) had a bluntly pointed folding blade that could be locked fully opened, closed against the wooden handle, or at a 90-degree angle, as could the folding pick blade on the opposite side of the head. Like the M1943, it was 20½in long folded and 28in extended. The folding **M1943 intrenching tool** (74-S-162), lacking the pick blade, was still in use by the Marines (along with the M1951) and by the ARVN. Fielded in 1968, the **M1967 collapsible intrenching tool** (5120-878-5932) or "tri-fold e-tool" was 23½in long opened, 9½in folded. The black two-section aluminum handle folded down no longer than the steel blade.

The **M1942 machete** (5110-00-813-1286) had an 18in darkened blade and black plastic grip. The OD canvas sheath had a metal throat and a double-hook; the light OD plastic sheath (8465-257-4321) of 1967 was of the same design, but made of rot-proof, pliable, pebbled plastic. Machetes were used to clear bivouac sites, weapon positions, fields of fire, and landing zones, but seldom for cutting trails due to the excessive noise.

Bayonets

American bayonets were attached to the left side of the belt or on the e-tool carrier by a web hanger and double-hook. Most scabbards were made of laminated woven-fiber molded thermoplastic, painted dark OD – "hardened plastic." They had a steel throat, to which the bayonet could be locked by the same latch locking it to the weapon's bayonet lug. The M4 through M7 bayonets used the M8A1 scabbard (1095-508-0339). Most had black plastic checkered grips, and a muzzle ring integral to the hilt guard. Few men actually carried bayonets, and those who did usually employed them as marginal utility knives. Nonetheless, there were some small actions when Americans and Australians charged with cold steel.

The 6.5in-blade 1944 **M4 bayonet-knife** (1005-716-0944) for M1 and M2 carbines proved to be a better utility knife than earlier bayonets. The M4 and later bayonets used the same blade and grip, differing in the muzzle ring. The blade had a spear point, and was sharpened full length on the lower edge and for 3in on the top. The spring-loaded release mechanism on the M4 and M6 was near the guard, while the M7 had a spring-loaded lever on the pommel.

The 6.6in **M5** and **M5A1 bayonet-knives** (1005-726-6556 & 1005-336-8568) of 1953 for the M1 rifle lacked a mounting ring, but had a stud on the guard fitting into the rifle's gas cylinder lock screw.

The 6.75in **M6 bayonet-knife** (1005-722-3097) was adopted in 1957 for the M14 rifle, more commonly seen with the Marines.

The 6.75in **M7 bayonet-knife** (1005-073-9238) introduced in 1964 for the M16A1 rifle was similar to the M6 but had a larger muzzle ring.

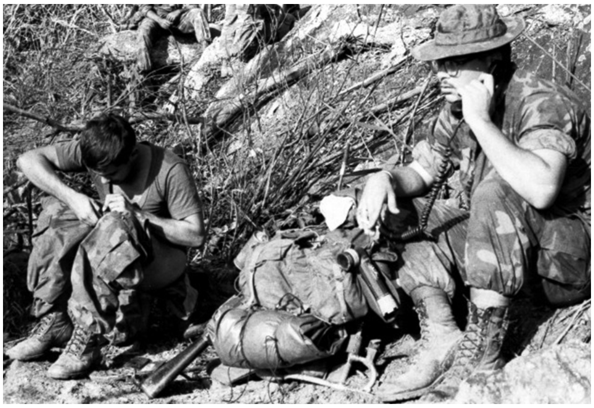
The 17in **M1917 bayonet** (1005-716-2797) with wooden grips was issued with 12-gauge riot shotguns. It was carried in an OD-painted leather M1917 scabbard fitted with a double-hook (no web carrier). From 1966 it was manufactured (to include in Canada) with black plastic grips (1005-943-2002), and OD-hardened plastic scabbards.

The ROK produced copies of the M4 and M5A1, the **K-M4** and **K-M5A1**, with the K-M8A1 scabbard.

ANZACs used the **L1A1** and **L1A2 bayonets** on L1A1 rifles. The former had a 7.75in blade and the latter an Australian-made 8in blade with a different point. The scabbards were blackened steel with a hanger stud (boss) on the front, to engage with a slot in the web bayonet frog (belt carrier).

The dark OD plastic right-angle **MX-991/U flashlight** (6230-264-8261) was adopted in 1960 and carried by most Army and Marine officers and NCOs; ANZACs called it a torch. Filters included red to preserve night vision, white diffused (dim), and clear refracted (to illuminate larger areas). It used two D-cell batteries (BA-30).

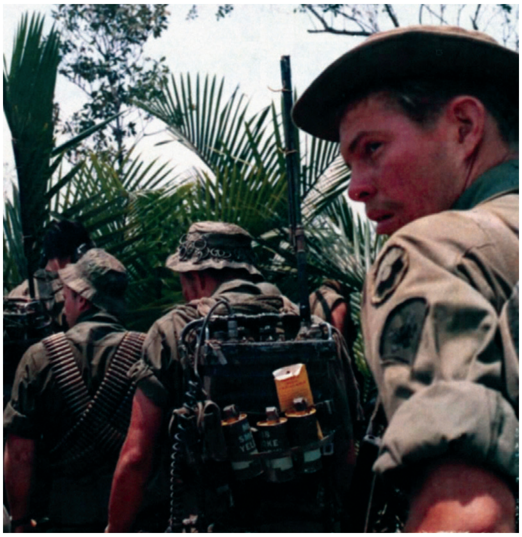
The **XM28E4 riot control agent mask** (4246-878-8296 – Medium; 4246-787-0009 – Large) or "CS mask" was issued in late 1969 to provide a more compact and lighter gasmask (standardized as the M28) than the bulky M17 field protective mask. Offering protection only from "teargas" (CS), it was made of OD pliable polyurethane with adjustable web head straps, and replaceable filters in both cheeks. The **XM19 riot control agent mask carrier** (4240-878-6037) was a nylon pouch with a flap secured by two LTD fasteners. Lined with chemical-proof vinyl, it had a roll throat, and two slide-fasteners on the back.



A marine clad in ERDL camouflage uniform talks on an AN/PRC-25 radio strapped to his lightweight rucksack's frame, along with the rucksack's pack with a bedroll strapped below it. An MX-991/U "right-angle flashlight" is clipped to the rucksack. (US Marine Corps History Division)

US rucksacks

The term "ruck" refers to backpacks with supporting frames, but also to backpacks without frames such as the "indig ruck" and

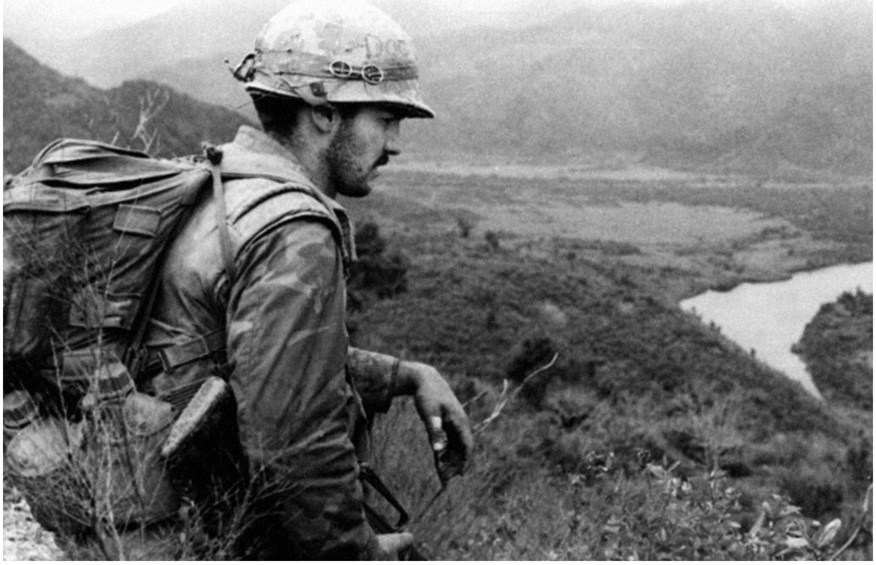


A 9th Inf Div radio-telephone operator (RTO) carries his AN/PRC-25 on the aluminum frame of a lightweight rucksack. Note that the long collapsible "whip" or "fishing pole" antenna is broken down into a bundle of sections linked by stretch cord, with the antenna's base piece attached to the radio. This indicates that the unit is operating at some distance from the battalion firebase; at shorter ranges the 3ft "tape antenna" would be used. On the radio's securing straps are three M18 yellow smoke grenades, and an orange envelope which holds pipe cleaners for cleaning the M16A1 rifle. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

"NVA ruck" – packs with a large main compartment and two or three external side/back pockets. The phrase "rucked up" or "saddled up" means a soldier has donned his fully loaded pack; the act of "humping a ruck" meant to carry a rucksack on a hard or lengthy march. To "pack a light ruck" refers to a minimal load for a day-long patrol or an overnight ambush, which required only one or two meals, less than a full load of canteens, and no sleeping gear. Marines did not generally use the term "ruck" but rather "pack," even if carrying a rucksack.

In 1965 a lightweight rucksack with an aluminum frame replaced the M1952 mountain rucksack (8465-261-6831) used by USSF, LRRPs, mountain, and arctic troops. The new rucksack would be extensively fielded in Vietnam owing to the inadequacy of the M1956 butt pack. Made of OG-106 nylon, the large main compartment was shallower but wider than that of traditional rucksacks. It was closed by a drawstring and a large flap incorporating a Velcro®-secured map compartment. It had three external pockets, and equipment attachment loops. The dark OD-painted tubular aluminum frame had padded shoulder straps (quick-release on the left), a lumbar band, and a waistband to reduce shifting. There was a bracket on the frame's right side to attach the rifle when snow skiing and climbing using the **rifle butt pocket and strap assembly** (8465-782-2779), or to secure an e-tool attached upside-down to the rucksack's end.

Only a small number of **T-62-2 lightweight rucksacks** (8465-889-3773) were produced for testing by USSF in 1962, with an M1956-like equipment belt and Davis buckle as the waist belt. The limited-procurement "pattern 64" **lightweight rucksack** (8465-965-4416), with minor improvements, was issued to USSF in Vietnam in 1964. It had a narrow nylon waist strap with snaphook and D-ring fastener, and the welded aluminum frame experienced breakage problems. A detachable aluminum **cargo shelf** (8465-782-6722)



A marine carrying a nylon tropical rucksack takes a break while descending a ridge. On the web helmet band are two hand grenade arming rings and pins. These were useful if a grenade's pin was pulled and discarded, but the grenade was then not thrown; a pin could be reinserted, though this was dangerous, as the "mousetrap" firing-pin striker might activate. The spare pins were also used to disarm grenade-based VC booby traps. (US Marine Corps History Division) could be attached to the frame's bottom as on a packboard, and three shelves were authorized per ten rucksacks. In 1965, the refined full-production "pattern 65" **lightweight nylon duck rucksack** (8465-782-3248) was introduced, with a riveted frame (8465-782-3249) less prone to breakage, and a new cargo shelf (same FSN) with five rather than two securing-strap slots. In 1968, an additional horizontal middle-back strap was added to the frame. (Canadian-made C1 and C2 copies had different materials and features.)

The field pack was normally attached to the lower portion of the frame, below the sleeping bag, bedroll, or equipment. This configuration could be reversed, since the idea was for the heavier weight to be carried high, so an AN/PRC-25 radio could be strapped to the upper frame with the pack below. However, the wide, wrap-around, low-riding frame prevented items from being attached to the back and sides of the waist belt – a major hindrance.

When troops were occupying hilltops it was sometimes difficult to reach streams in the valley bottoms, forcing them to collect rainwater in ponchos (which gave it a rubbery taste). In Vietnam the Marines used the Army lightweight poncho, having retired their canvas reversible camouflaged poncho used in WW II and Korea. The left-hand man carries a white star "pop-up" flare under the flap of his "M1944" combat pack, an M1943 e-tool, and (on the far side) an M1952 machete. Note that all three wear helmet liners only, not their "steel pots." (US Marine Corps History Division)

Development of the **tropical rucksack** (8465-935-6673) as a larger equivalent to the ARVN rucksack (see below) began in 1965. It was approved in late 1968 and issued to combat units in 1969, but never fully replaced the lightweight rucksack. It was issued with one large (Size No. 2 – 8465-935-6858) and three small (Size No. 1 – 8465-935-6857) waterproof pack/pocket-liner bags. It was improved over the ARVN rucksack by being made of nylon, larger, with refinements including a better-designed dark OD-painted spring-steel X-back frame with lumbar pad and quick-release shoulder straps (the flat X-frame could bow outward to dig into the wearer's back, however). It had three external pockets and seven equipment hanger-loops. The pockets were sewn to the body only on their side edges to provide "tunnels" through which equipment items like machetes could be attached to hanger loops. The top flap included a waterproofed map compartment. If the rucksack was worn high enough and the equipment belt a bit low, gear could be attached to the belt's back.

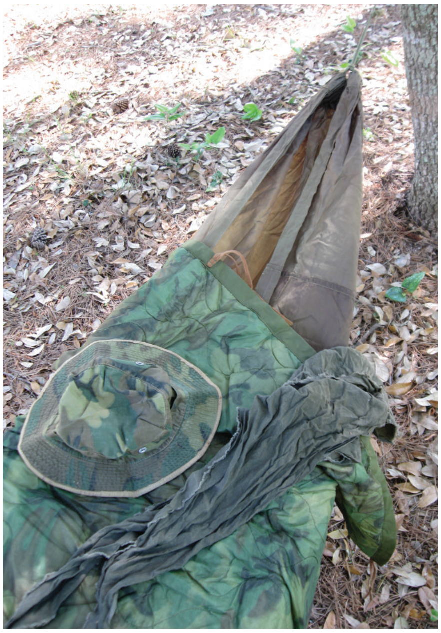
The **plywood packboard** (8465-255-8223) was adopted in 1943 to carry heavy cargo and crew-served weapons. The 14in x 24in packboard was made from dark OD-painted ¼in plywood with curved side edges. There were four rectangular openings in which cargo attachment shelves (8465-270-0415) could be fitted. Inside the curved board was a tightly stretched canvas panel to protect the wearer's back, and it was fitted with shoulder straps with thin pads (8465-244-0737). Packboards were mainly used in Vietnam by the Marines to carry a 60mm M19 mortar or 60mm and 81mm mortar rounds, or 3.5in bazooka rockets. C-ration cases, 5gal water cans, ammo cans, telephone wire reels, and any other items/supplies up to 100lb weight were also carried. AN/PRC-25 radios were often lashed to the packboard, with the RTO's gear in a lightweight rucksack without a frame or a bedroll strapped beneath.

US shelter items

Besides acting as rain garments, one- or two-man tents, and bedroll covers, ponchos could be rigged as litters, body bags, and wrapped round "brushwood rafts" for crossing streams. Both models of poncho measured 66in x 92in, and were also designated "lightweight poncho with hood."

The **nylon-coated poncho** (8405-290-0550) was adopted in 1953, in OG-207 nylon twill vinyl-coated on both sides. There were eight snaps on each long side, grommets in the corners and midway on each edge, a waist cord, and a drawstring-secured hood in the center. Condensation was a problem; the surface also glistened to reveal sentries on rainy nights, and it made distinctive popping and rustling noises when moving through vegetation. It became Standard B in 1967.

The **wet weather poncho** (8405-935-3257) was developed to provide a lighter and less bulky poncho with less reflective qualities and reduced condensation. It was tested in Vietnam in mid-1967 and issued a year later. Produced in both OG-207 and the ERDL four-color pattern, it was of the same design as the earlier model but made of rip-stop nylon with a textured external coating, and lacked the waist cord.



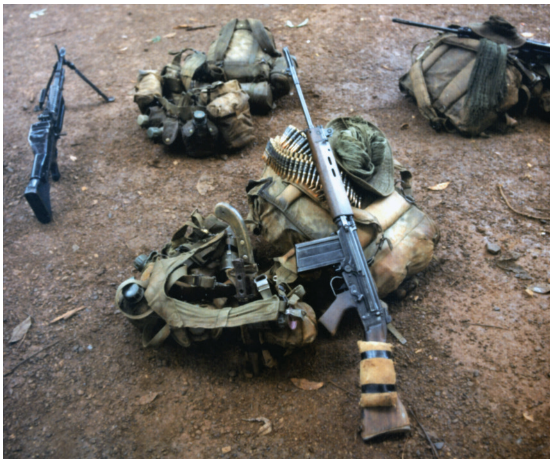
Items carried by the author in Vietnam: a local-purchase "boonie hat" and a 37in x 37in x 52in OD muslin triangular bandage used as a "sweat rag" are displayed on an issue poncho liner, lying on an indigenous nylon hammock rigged with 550 cord. Note the seam of the extension added to the end of the hammock to accommodate the author's height. (Author's collection)

The 1963 **poncho liner** (8405-889-3683) was a lightweight comforter with tie-cords to fasten inside a poncho; its thin nylon shell and polyester batting provided warmth to 50°F (10°C) even when wet. Often used as a blanket for the folding cot (7105-935-0422), it measured 62in x 82in and had no head opening. Early liners were printed in the "frog" or "duck hunter" pattern with medium and light green splotches on a pale green or tan background, and some were light OG-107 on one or both sides. Most liners were printed on both sides in the ERDL pattern of medium green, brown, and black on a pale green backing, but the intensity and predominance of shades varied greatly between lots and manufacturers. Some soldiers had rain jackets lined with poncho liner material (these were *not* called "woobies" until long after Vietnam).

The **pneumatic mattress** (8465-254-8887 – "air mattress" or "rubber bitch") of OG-207 nylon coated with synthetic rubber was adopted in 1952. It consisted of six longitudinal tubes, the tapered outer ones slightly larger in diameter than the central four, 72in long, 34in wide at the "shoulders," and 5in thick. An oral inflation tube was located at the head end. In heavy rains it kept a man off flooded ground, and could also be used to float casualties and equipment across streams.

The **field type insect bar** (7210-266-9736) was a dark OD nylon mosquito net designed to be suspended inside a two-man pup tent. It was 120in long, 72in wide, and 48in high. The dark OD **insect net protector** (7210-266-9740) was erected over a folding cot or bunkbed, 79in long, 32in wide, and 59in high. The two types of nets are often confused. The **insect headnet** (8415-261-6630) was made with an OG nylon crown and mesh covering the head and shoulders. The 1964 **multi-purpose net** (8465-889-3771) was made of ½in-mesh dark OG nylon netting, 60in x 108in, with two 14ft integral cords for hanging. It could be used as a hammock, or hung hammock-like against bunker walls for storage; to camouflage positions; as a seine net for fishing, or to make animal traps; to carry bulky supplies from landing zones, or as an emergency litter – irritating, as it snagged on everything. Mosquito nets were not necessary as often as thought, and troops often relied on insect repellent and wearing their sleeves down.

ANZAC WEB EQUIPMENT



An Australian rifleman's kit, of mainly P'37 and P'44 Webbing Equipment with the 1968 large field pack (Aust). Rising in the center of the dumped WE in the foreground can be seen the pale handle of a small "bolo" knife. A shell dressing is taped to the stock of the 7.62mm L1A1 self-loading rifle. Each section (squad) had a US M60 machine gun (upper left) with a two-man crew, and its belts of "link" were shared out among the section. (Tom Laemlein/ Armor Plate Press)

The British Commonwealth (the post-WWII term for the former Empire) fought through WW II and Korea with Pattern 37 cotton web equipment. This heavy, tan-colored "webbing," evolved from the Mills Pattern 08 of WW I, was ill-suited for the tropics. Late in WW II a new set was developed for tropical use; this P'44, in dark jungle green (JG) webbing, was lighter and more versatile than P'37, but the war ended before it could be issued. At one time it was intended to standardize P'44 for the British Army, but this was cancelled on cost grounds, and issue was limited to units deployed to the Far East. Australia also retained P'37 WE, but units that served in the Malayan Emergency (Australian participation 1955–60) and the Indonesian–Malaysian Confrontation in Borneo (Australian participation 1964–66) were issued P'44 from British stores, and returned to Australia with it. In Vietnam both P'37 and P'44 WE were used, usually mixed.[5] It was under consideration to adopt US M1956 equipment with magazine pouches for Australian weapons, and this was tested at the British Army Jungle Warfare Training School in Malaysia in 1961.

Pattern 37 WE was an integrated set based on a waist belt and braces (suspenders), with two deep basic (ammunition and grenade) pouches attached to both belt and braces, a bayonet frog (carrier), and waterbottle and intrenching-tool carriers. Both a "large pack" (usually left with unit transport), and a "small pack" or haversack, had L-shaped detachable shoulder straps with quick-release hooks which engaged with loops behind the tops of the pouches. When the large pack was worn on the back the haversack could alternatively be attached at the left hip. The WE was usually tan, but sometimes bulk-dyed "emergency green."

In 1946–47, **P'44 WE** was further tested and improvements made. The three-piece waist belt was adjustable for all sizes, with a more versatile arrangement of buckles and loops, and eyelets for attaching items with US double-hooks. Each brace was now a reversed Y-strap, dividing in two behind the shoulders, for better-balanced loads. The P'37 WE had brass fittings that corroded in contact with damp webbing, so P'44 WE used aluminum, often blackened or green-finished. The left-hand of the paired basic pouches (to Diggers, "bongos") had bayonet-scabbard loops on its left side; the lid-type flaps now had quick-release tabs and loops, and the model made in the 1960s had two sets of rear belt hooks for adjustable height on the belt. The enlarged haversack had waterproof lining, two external side pockets (one for a mess tin), and late patterns added more equipment loops for external stowage. The 1qt aluminum waterbottle and cup had a loose cover accommodating a filtration bag and sterilizing tablets; it closed with LTD fasteners, and had both a double-hook and a belt loop.

Besides this basic JG fungus-proofed webbing set there was a variety of ancillary equipment: a pistol case (holster), pistol ammunition pouch, binocular case, compass pocket, and 18in machete scabbard (identical to the US M1942). Some items were Canadian-made. There was also a much desired but scarce P'44 waterproof-lined rucksack with three large external pockets, which could be fitted to the aluminum general service manpack frame or to a US lightweight rucksack frame.

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[5] See Osprey Men-at-Arms 108, *British Infantry Equipments (2) 1908–2000* (revised 2000); and Elite 103, *Vietnam ANZACs: Australian & New Zealand Troops in Vietnam 1962–72.*

In 1966 a new, larger basic pouch was introduced; a ½in deeper, with improved attachments, these were called **"Bren pouches."** Basic pouches held, alternatively, 3x L1A1 rifle 20-rd magazines; 2x L2A1 automatic rifle 30-rd magazines; 4–6x SMG magazines depending on model; 4–5x frag grenades; 2x smoke or WP grenades; 2x 50-rd 7.62mm clip bandoliers; or 6x 40mm grenades. Riflemen carried five magazines initially, but later seven plus a bandolier or two. Some riflemen carried a 30-rd L2A1 automatic-rifle magazine in their "gat" (rifle). Scouts and some section leaders were armed with M16A1s, which replaced 9mm Owen and F1 SMGs; American M1956 ammo pouches were used with M16A1s. Most members of the section carried a 100-rd M60 belt, and black plastic sleeves were available to protect these. US grenades, pyrotechnic signals, LAWs, and Claymores were all used by the ANZACs.

The 1968 **canvas field pack** (**Aust**) or "large pack" was used with P'44 and M1956 web gear; with the latter it was intended to accompany the "bum pack." It had two internal compartments and two side pockets, with plentiful equipment loops. It never fully replaced the US lightweight and tropical

F

ANZAC EQUIPMENT

(1) The "Diggers" and "Kiwis" used British-inspired Australian "web equipment," as well as American M1956 gear both US- and Australian-made. The 1968 canvas field pack (Aust) – "large" or "big pack" – was popular. The upper compartment held rations and mission equipment, "soft kit" being placed against the wearer's back for padding from "hard kit." The lower compartment, which opened from the underside, held the bedroll – the "swag." On the sides were small pockets, and web equipment loops, which were also fitted around the lower pack and on the top flap, along with intrenching-tool straps. Waterbottles and smoke grenades were routinely attached to these loops (but are omitted here for clarity). The large pack could be dropped when contact was made, leaving the soldier with his "basic webbing." A field dressing is taped to the stock of the 7.62mm L1A1 rifle; they were also taped to bayonet and knife scabbards, as well as carried in M1956 first aid pouches.

(2) This set of WE is a mix of US M1956 and Australian equipment. Hooked to the stowage straps of a P'37 "large pack," with L-shaped shoulder straps, is an uncovered M1951 combination e-tool ("banjo"), worn over an M1956 belt and suspenders; two M1956 universal ammunition cases (with the "US" changed to "AUST") each holding two 20-rd L1A1 magazines; two Canadian-made P'37 basic pouches for grenades and MG ammunition; two P'44 aluminum waterbottles (the covers marked "D↑D"); an M1956 "bum pack" holding a 24-hour "rat pack" and personal items; and a 9ft "toggle rope" wound into a skein.

(3) This WE set consists of all Australian-made components, to include the M1956 items: M1956 belt and braces; 1968 "large pack," with fewer equipment loops than **(1)**; an M1951 e-tool; M18 colored smoke grenade on a side pocket, and a camouflaged individual shelter carrier; M1956 first aid pouch; large "Bren" pouches; L1A1 bayonet with black P'37 frog; M1910-type canteen covers with plastic canteens; M1961 "bum pack," and toggle rope.

(4) A variant compass pocket. The standard tan P'37 and JG P'44 items resembled the pistol cartridge pockets; the P'44 had a tab-and-loop rather than a snap fastener, and two eyelets at the bottom of the oversize backing panel. The Stanley prismatic compass is British.

(5) Both Australian and US waterbottles/canteens might be carried together, and both fitted in the case/cover for either one. This Australian 1qt aluminum waterbottle, with aluminum or OD plastic cap and nesting cup, is shown with the P'44 case.

(6) Australian-made US M1956-type canteen covers retained the slide-fasteners, but added a double-hook. Both US- and Australian-made 1qt plastic canteens were used.

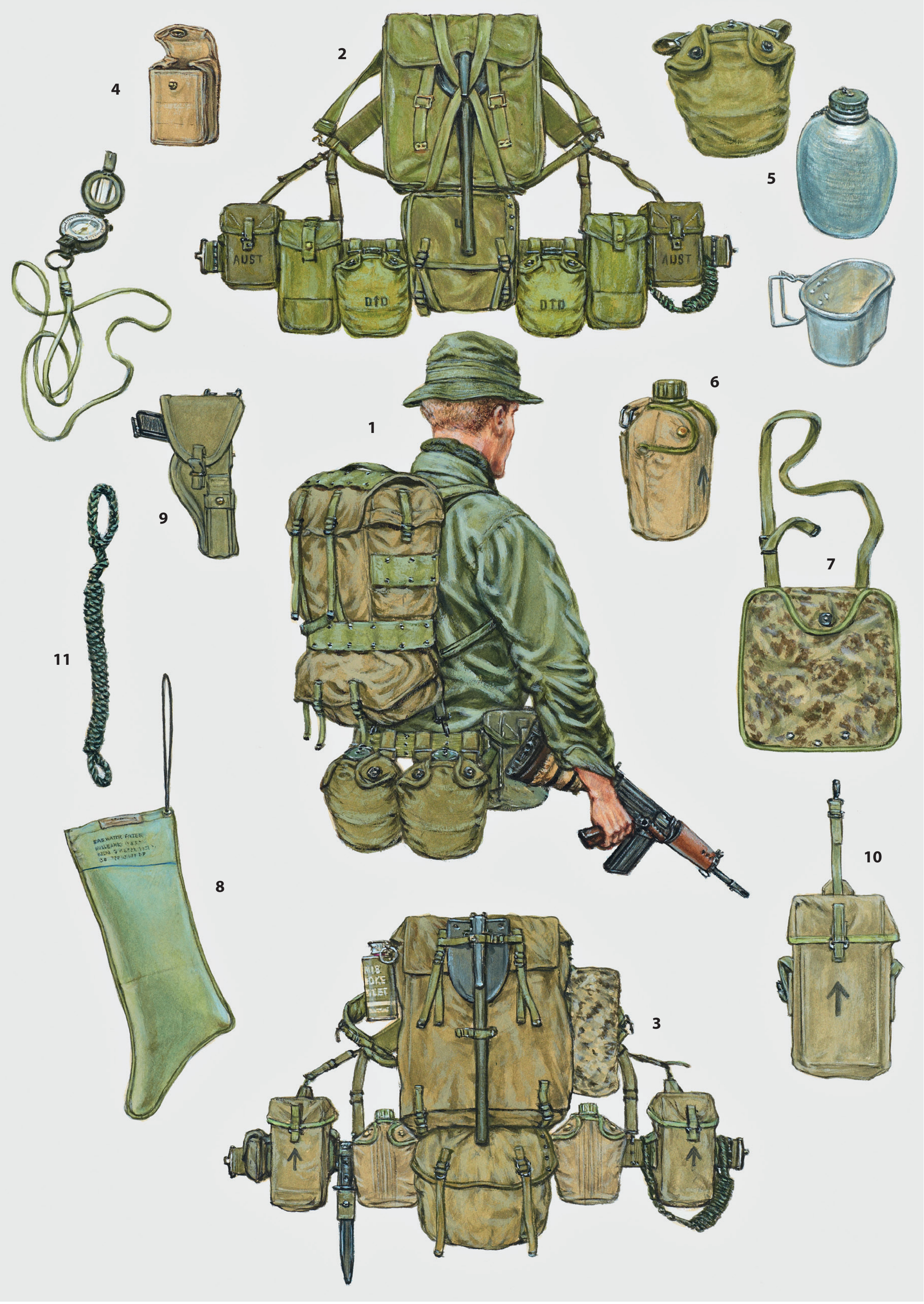
(7) The Australian-made 2qt collapsible bladder canteen, based on the US "first pattern," saw some use. Its vinyl-coated cover was printed with a brown-on-OD camouflage pattern, which was also used for the individual shelter carrier.

(8) The Millbank water filter bag pre-filtered water to remove silt, algae, and vegetation debris before adding purification tablets.

(9) The Canadian-made P'51 pistol case held a 9mm L9A1 Browning Hi-Power with a spare 13-rd magazine.

(10) There were several versions of basic pouches or "bongos," issued in pairs of right and left versions. This enlarged basic pouch, introduced in 1968 to better accommodate magazines, was called a "Bren pouch" after earlier enlarged versions. Note US-style grenade attachment loops and straps on the sides.

(11) Many infantrymen carried a 9ft-long "toggle rope." These ½in-diameter green nylon utility ropes could be linked together to make a longer rope for climbing and stream-crossing, fabricating rope bridges and litters, or securing prisoners.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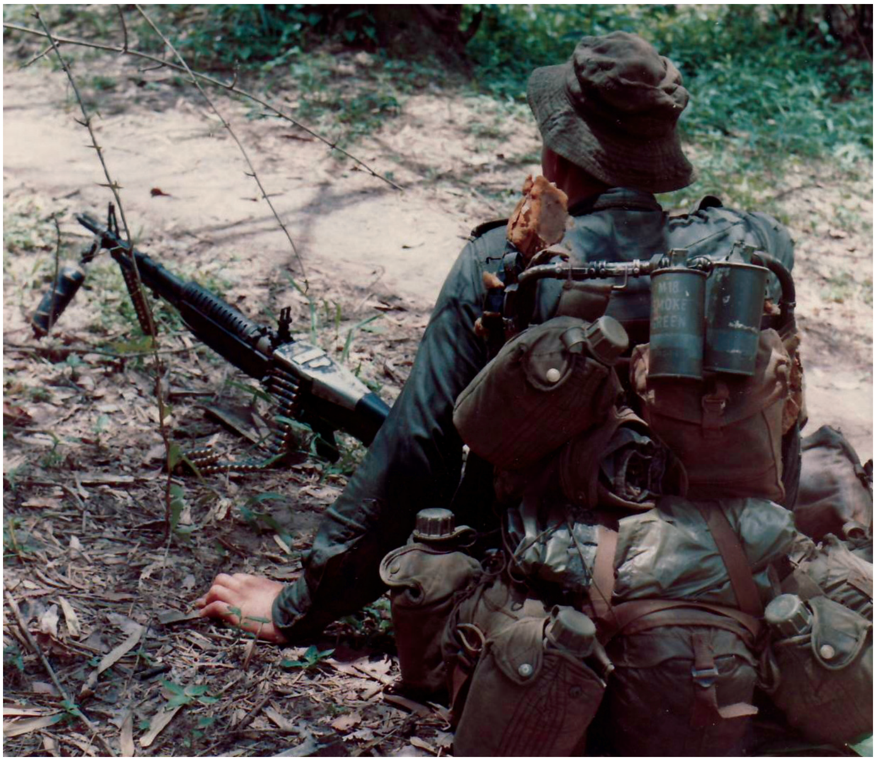
An Australian M60 machine-gunner outposts a trail. He carries a US lightweight rucksack, its shoulder straps roughly padded with taped-on foam rubber. His individual shelter and liner are rolled and strapped on top of the rucksack, along with smoke grenades, a half-dozen canteens, and (upper right) an enlarged P'44 "Bren pouch." Note the shell dressing taped to the M60's left bipod leg. (NARA)



rucksacks, which were extremely popular – ANZACs used to barter for them, and radio operators ("sigs") were particularly fond of the lightweight rucksack frame. The wide-necked P'44 aluminum waterbottle in its loose cover was popular, but US plastic canteens and covers were also widely used. An important item was the Millbank water filter bag for filtering gunk out before inserting purification tablets.

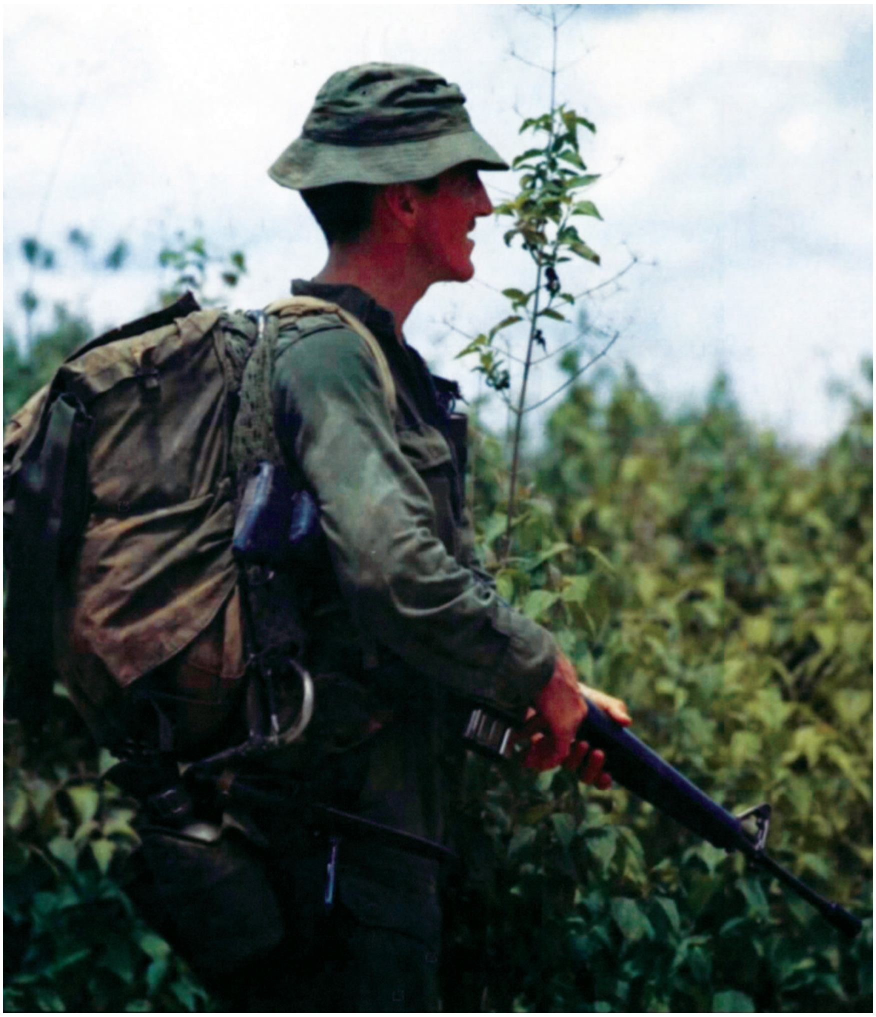
With the deployment of Australian infantry battalions in 1965, **M1956 WE** began to be acquired, at first directly from US manufacturers but marked with "D/broad arrowhead/D." These were only ordered in small qualities, and subsequent batches (more commonly seen) were simply standard US M1956 items with "US" markings. The final orders, in 1968–71, were Australian-made but identical to US items; they lacked "DD" markings, but sometimes bore a large broad arrowhead. These were made in the Australian lighter OD with lime-green nylon edge-binding, and green-finished snaps.

In 1968 an enlarged M1956 universal ammunition case – "large ammunition pouch" – was made in Australia to better accommodate L1A1 magazines. Webbing equipment then consisted of the M1956 belt, suspenders, large ammo pouches, waterbottle cover, combat field pack, e-tool carrier lacking the bayonet fitting (a copy of the US combination e-tool was made), and first aid pouch. The waterbottle cover retained the US slide-keepers, but added a double-hook for attachment either high or low on the waist belt. The P'37 bayonet frog attached to the belt by a web loop to be carried high, or by double-hooks to carry low, and might be OD or black-dyed (originally for parade use). The combat field pack or "bum pack" was a copy of the US M1961.

M1956 items were neither contracted nor issued in complete sets, but ordered piecemeal when needed, and all three types were mixed – M1956, P'37 and P'44. Basic pouches, for example, were adapted to M1956 belts and suspenders by cutting belt slits in the back of the pouches or securing them with wire or cord. Both US and Australian 1qt canteens/waterbottles were carried. A domestic item was a 2qt collapsible water bladder based on the US "first pattern," in an OD rubberized cloth cover camouflaged with brown splotches.

The **individual shelter** ("bivvy," "hoochie," "hutchie," or "basha") was a JG nylon tarp vinyl-coated on one side. It had four snap-secured tabs on the long edges, one centered on the short edges, and one in each corner with a grommet. Measuring 8ft 10in x 6ft 2in, it was used as a fly tarpaulin to be pitched low over two-man positions; more commonly it was laid on the ground folded lengthwise as a groundsheet and rain cover. A brown wool liner ("horse blanket") with matching snap-tabs was available but unpopular; it was heavy, especially when wet, and US poncho liners were preferred. There were complaints that the hoochie was too heavy, bulky, glistened when wet, and was difficult to erect among brush because of its large size.

As with American troops, the ANZACs were given a great deal of latitude in "kitting up," and the "blanket folders" (Royal Australian Army Service Corps quartermaster storemen) did their best to obtain useful kit.



This Digger wears a utility or "giggle" hat. US M1 steel helmets were issued, and camouflaged with net and strips of burlap "scrim," but the hat was usually worn for field operations; the helmet made a scraping noise when pushing through vegetation, and the hat allowed better vision and hearing. He is armed with an M16A1 rifle, as usually carried by the two scouts of each section (squad), and often by the section leader, while the four to six other riflemen carried L1A1s. His pack is the popular US lightweight rucksack made of nylon duck. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

G RECONNAISSANCE TEAM EQUIPMENT

To locate an elusive enemy operating on rugged and remote terrain, numerous reconnaissance units were employed at all command echelons: Military Assistance Command-Vietnam's Studies and Observation Group (MACV-SOG); USSF Projects Delta, Gamma, Omega, and Sigma; more than a dozen LRRP/Ranger companies; Marine 1st and 3rd Force Reconnaissance Companies, and other elements.*

Recon teams typically comprised 4–14 men, and most missions lasted only 3–6 days owing to the need for the team to carry everything it needed – no resupply was possible, so reducing weight and bulk was essential. They needed two long-range radios with spare batteries, rations, water, a range of day and night air/ground marker aids, and a great deal of firepower, with enough ammunition to enable them to break contact several times and survive running battles with superior forces.

For example, a MACV-SOG One-Zero's (team leader's) munitions might include an XM177E2 SMG with 27x 20-rd magazines (= 540 rds); a 9mm FN-Browning Hi-Power pistol with 2x 13-rd magazines; an M18A1 Claymore mine (sometimes rigged for delay detonation if the rucksack had to be abandoned); 6x M67 fragmentation grenades, 3x V40 "mini-frag" or "hooch-popper" grenades, M34 WP or AN-M8 white smoke grenades, one M7A2 "teargas" grenade, and 3x M18 colored smoke grenades; an M49A1 trip flare, and two ground-launched "pop-up" signals. All these items were carried in ammo pouches, BAR belts, canteen covers, and/or Claymore bags. Some recon men used enemy AK-47 chest ammunition carriers or SKS 10-pocket cartridge belts, each pocket holding an M16 or XM177 magazine.

Additional medical items were carried, to include morphine syrettes and a serum albumin can (blood volume expander – 6505-299-8179), often taped to the suspenders yoke over the shoulders. Though it was little used by conventional troops, recon men used stick-form camouflage face paint (8510-161-6204 or 29-P-800 – WW II or KW stocks), contained in tin-plate tubes with light green in one end and "loam" (very dark green) in the other. The paste of these "camo" sticks was very hard, and was sometimes softened with a flame before application. The NVA/VC referred to recon teams as "men with green faces."

Individual and team equipment varied greatly, not only between the different organizations conducting recon missions but between individual teams. Team SOPs were the guiding factor, and many teams had standardized positions and means for carrying team equipment so that it could be quickly recovered from casualties.

(1) Wide use was made of both the lightweight rucksack and frame, and this later tropical rucksack. On the "ruck" are M18 red and AN/M8 white smoke grenades (the latter's light green body streaked with dark "camo stick"); an M7A2 "teargas" grenade; and an M1942 18in machete in a plastic sheath, slipped through the tunnel behind a side pocket. Several canteens and an M18A1 Claymore M7 bandoleer would also be typical, but have been omitted here so as not to cover other details. Sometimes the X-back frame was removed and the ruck was attached to the aluminum frame of the lightweight rucksack; this was popular for the amount, variety, and weight of the loads that could be attached. This soldier is armed with a 5.56mm XM177E2 submachine gun.

(2) Recon men typically carried a great deal of ammunition and numerous other items on their web gear in case their rucksack was lost. This example of a recon "harness" is based on M1956 ILCE, but with M1967 nylon canteen covers: two with canteens, two holding 6x 20-rd magazines each, and one accommodating 6x M67 grenades. With the four M1956 ammo pouches, these gave a total of 20 magazines. A USAF survival knife, a strobe light and a carabiner are attached to the suspenders.

Specialized items carried by team members included a number of air/ground marking aids to pinpoint the team's location to aircraft, day and night:

(3) 14in–24in square section cut from a 24in x 72in VS-17/GVX nylon panel (8345-174-6865), fluorescent orange on one side and cerise red (pink) on the other. Some men lined the inside of their boonie hats with panel material and "flashed" the upturned hat at aircraft; for this the orange side was preferred.

(4) SDU-5/E distress marker light (6230-067-5209 – "strobe light"), with its OD or sage-green nylon case, and the flash guard that was slipped over the body for stowage. It used a BA-1574/U battery.

(5) Mk 3 emergency signaling mirror, 3in x 5in (6350-299-6197).

(6) M186 Gyro Jet projector (1370-921-6172 – "pen flare gun") with 7x red, white, and green flares in a tape bandoleer.

(7) M127A1 white star parachute "pop-up" flare, a hand-launched rocket-propelled flare signal to mark own location.

Other items illustrated are: **(8)** a can of serum albumin blood-volume expander; **(9)** a lensatic compass; **(10)** a 1in x 2½in tin tube "camo" or "cami" stick of dark and light green face paint and **(11),** an AN/PRC-90 ("Prick-90") A/G emergency radio; alternatives were the ARC/RT-10 ("Arc-10") or AN/URC-64 ("Erk-64").

(12) Some teams carried an M79 grenade launcher with 3–4in of the barrel cut off, sights removed, and the stock sawn down to a pistol grip, as a close-range "break-contact" weapon firing HE and buckshot. They were carried either on a 550 - cord loop around the neck, in a tunnel-sleeve sewn under the rucksack, in rigger-made canvas holsters, or in modified radio accessories bags. This is the CW-503/PRC (5820-086-7138) with two slide-keepers, for the AN/PRC-25 or -77 accessories, shortened by 1½in for use as a holster. An alternative was the CW-216A/PR (5820-355-8537), with a double-hook and two belt loops, for the AN/PRC-10.

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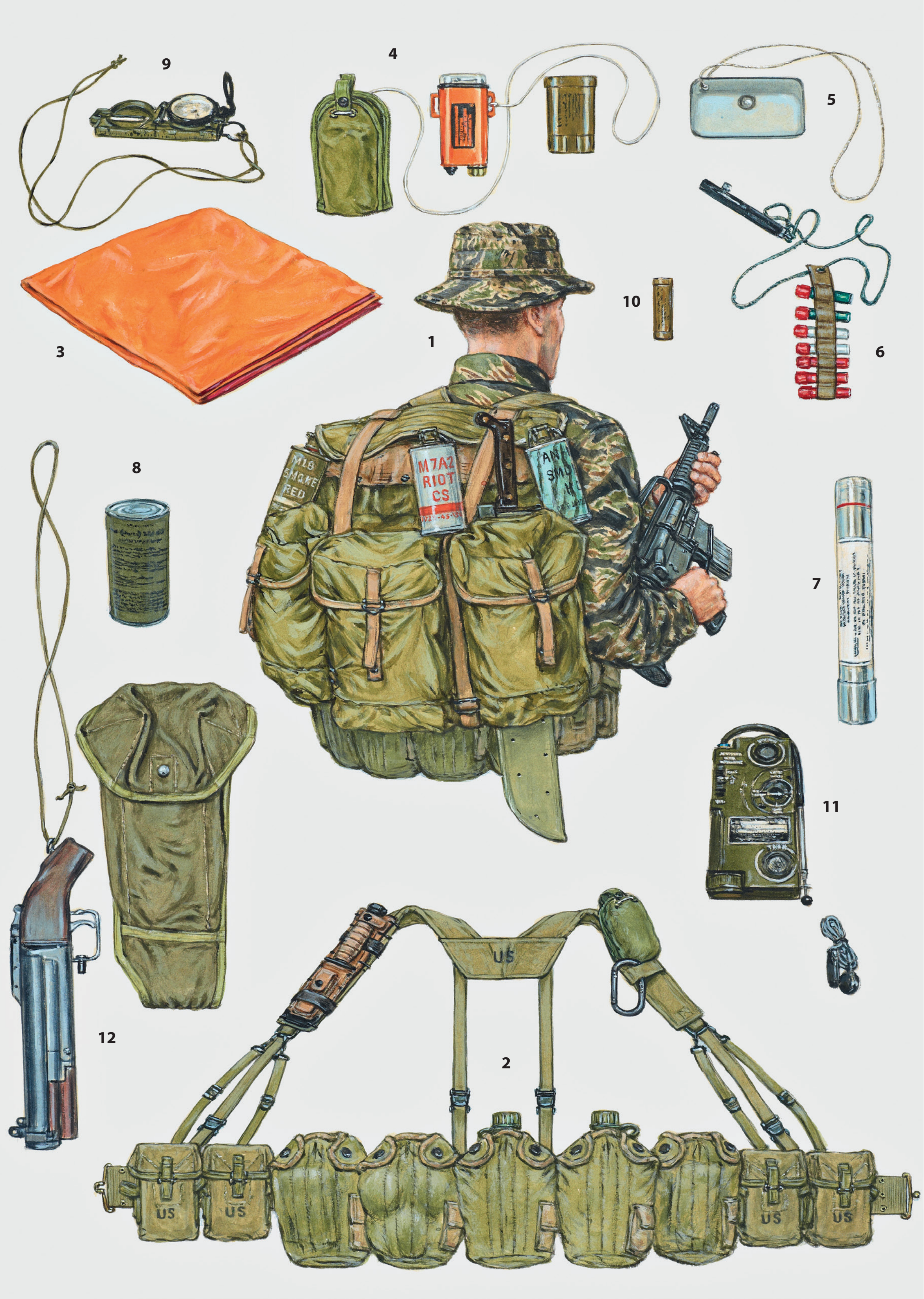
* For further details, see Osprey Warrior 132, *US Army Long-Range Patrol Scout in Vietnam 1965–71*; Warrior 159, *US MACV-SOC Reconnaissance Team in Vietnam*; and Warrior 28, *Green Beret in Vietnam 1957–73*.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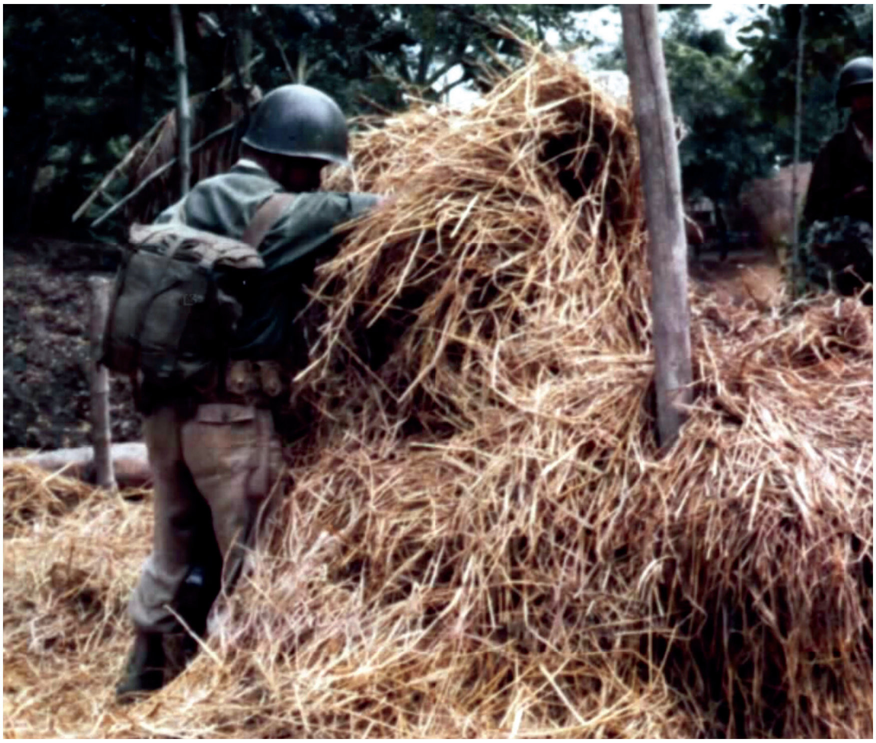
An ARVN soldier searching a pile of rice straw carries an M1945 combat field pack, M1923 cartridge belt, and other Korean War-era web gear along with an M1 Garand rifle. World War II and Korean War equipment was issued to the ARVN and Vietnamese security forces; they eventually received M1956 gear when they were issued M16A1 rifles and M79 grenade launchers. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)



ARVN, FREE WORLD FORCES, AND INDIGENOUS EQUIPMENT

The size problem

The US conducted extensive studies to determine criteria for equipment suitable for Asian troops. Their light weight and short stature meant that simply issuing smaller-sized US equipment items was inadequate. At age 20 the average Vietnamese was 5ft 2½in tall and weighed 108lb; a Thai was 5ft 4½in, at 120lb; South Koreans averaged 5ft 8½in and 128lb 5oz; and the average American was 5ft 8½in and weighed 152lb 8oz. The rule of thumb that a soldier should carry a combat load of no more than one-third his body weight translated to 50lb for an American and 30–35lb for an Asian – but that was unachievable, since it was impossible to reduce the weight of weapons, ammunition, water, and most equipment. Small-size belts and suspenders were issued, and the smaller frame and waist size prevented the same numbers and types of equipment being attached – but a 100-rd belt of M60 ammunition still weighed 6lb 12oz, whoever was carrying it. While WW II/KW and M1956 gear were not recommended for Asian use, those were the equipments available (M1967 nylon gear was not issued). Asian rations were slightly lighter and the soldiers required less water, but the overall burden on Asian soldiers was reduced by only a few pounds at best.

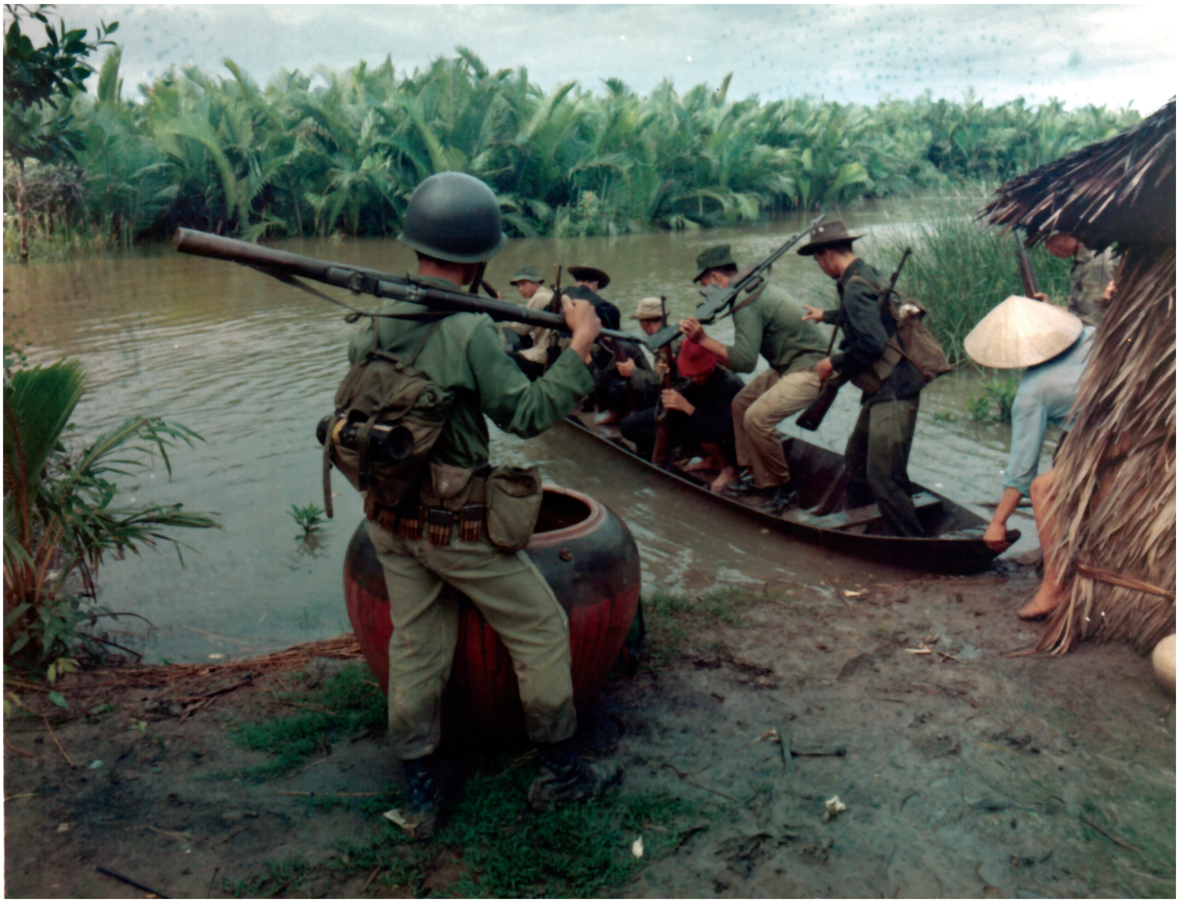
World War II and Korean War equipment

The end of WW II found the US Army with vast stocks of unissued web gear, and additional equipment was produced from 1951. Korean War equipment was essentially the same as WW II items, with some retaining old QM stock numbers and never assigned FSNs; later production items had minor specification changes over the pre-1951 gear, and most received FSNs. This equipment was made of OD No. 7 cotton webbing and duck, though some older gear in lighter OD No. 3 and OD No. 9 (tan) occasionally surfaced in Vietnam. The M1910 double-hooks fitted the M1956 equipment belts. M1956 ILCE items with slide-keepers would fit on the M1936 pistol belt, as would M1956 suspenders on the M1923 cartridge, M1936 pistol, and M1937 BAR belts. Most items used LTD fasteners. This equipment was issued to ARVN, RVN paramilitary, and ROK forces armed with WW II/KW-era weapons. Occasionally, old French leather and web gear were seen.[6]

Some items were used by US forces. TV footage shows paratroopers with President Lyndon Johnson during a late 1967 visit to Cam Ranh Bay wearing M1956 butt packs and M1945 combat packs with X-back suspenders, no doubt in an effort to provide more load-carrying capacity.

Indigenous equipment

The Counterinsurgency Support Office (CISO) was established by Headquarters, US Army, Ryukyu Islands on Okinawa in 1963. It developed, contracted, and forwarded to Vietnam lightweight, low-cost clothing and



Popular Force militiamen armed with M1 rifles, M2 carbines, and a BAR (*súng trung liên*, "rifle, medium rapid fire") board a sampan for a local patrol of the canal passing beside their Mekong Delta village. The foreground man armed with a Garand rifle carries an ARVN rucksack, and below it note the M1 rifle clips slipped onto a web belt around his waist by forcing the strap between the two rows of cartridges.. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

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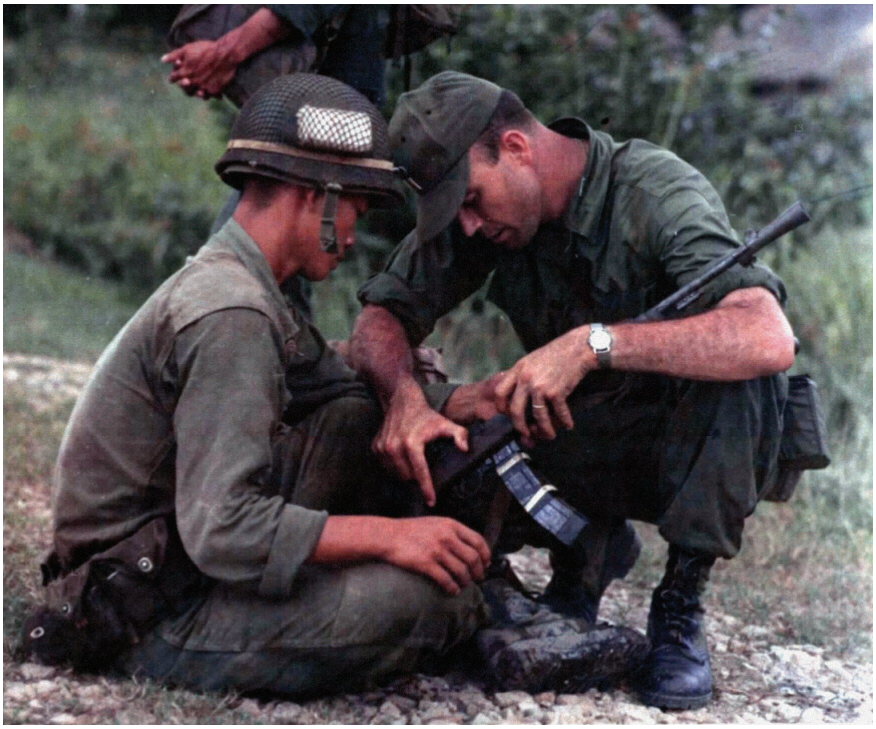
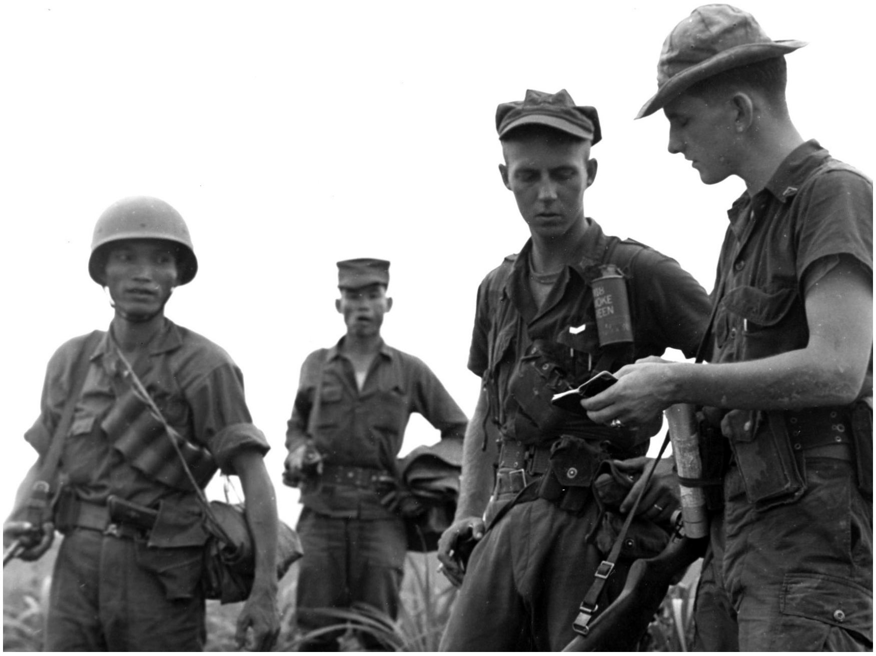
[6] For more complete descriptions see Elite 210, *World War II US Army Combat Equipments*, and Men-at-Arms 458, *Army of the Republic of Vietnam 1955–75*.

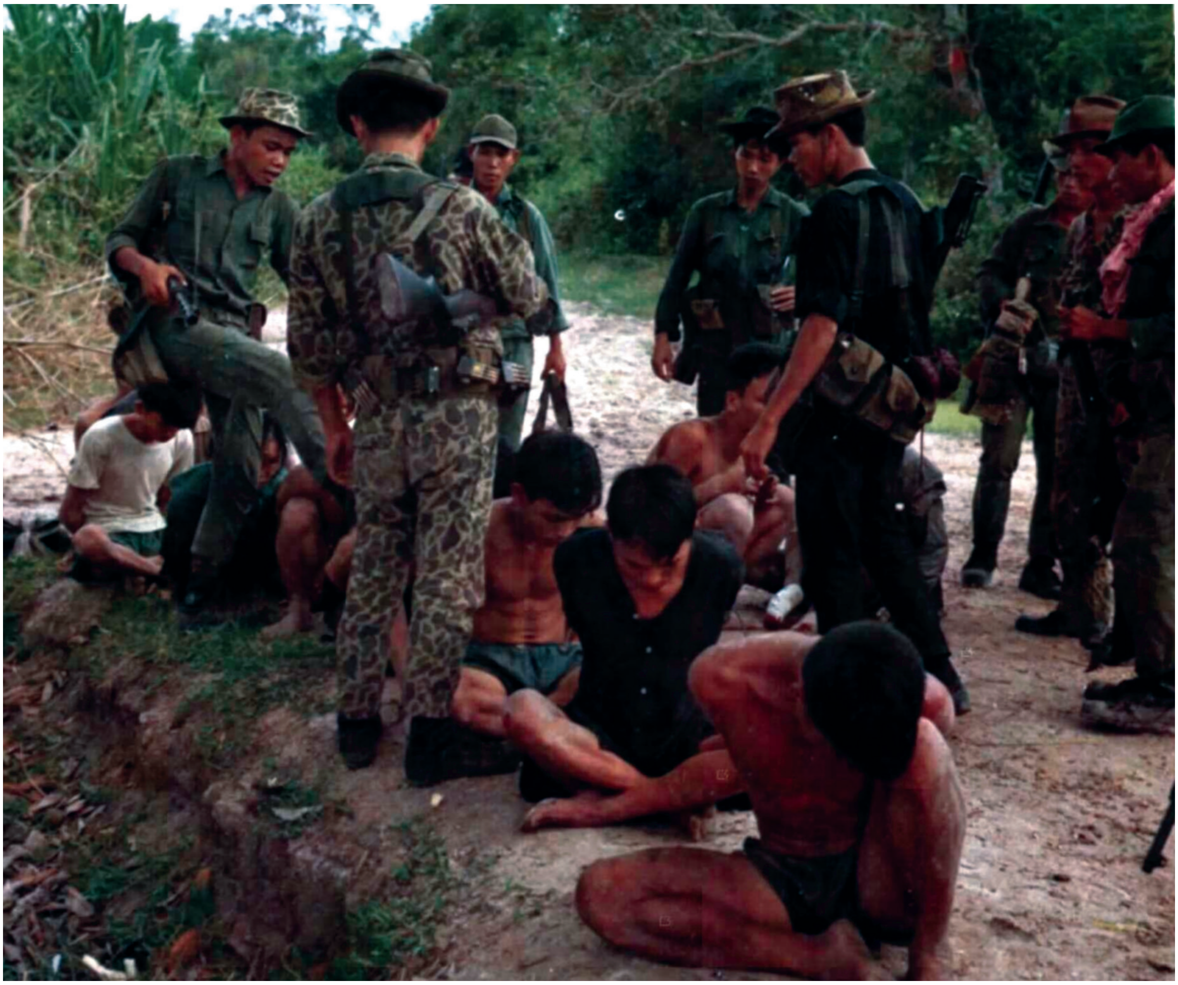
A US advisor checks an ARVN soldier's .30cal M2 carbine with two 30-rd "banana" magazines taped together. The *linh* wears an M1923 cartridge belt for M1 rifle clips, but 10-rd carbine charging clips could be fitted in the pockets. The carbine is fitted with an M3 flash hider; this suppressed muzzle flash to a degree, and also helped keep rice-paddy mud from entering the muzzle. A field dressing is held under the "stretchy" mesh camouflage net of the helmet. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)



equipment for the CIDG and MACV-SOG. The scores of Special Forces A-camps with battalion-sized CIDG strike forces, and the five regimental-size MIKE Forces, were supplied from the Logistical Support Center at the 5th SF Group HQ, Nha Trang, through five Logistical Support Points. CISO equipment was not issued to the ARVN, which received US equipment through the ARVN Central Logistics Command.

The US Marine Corps' Combined Action Program (CAP) combined 13-man Marine rifle squads augmented by a Navy corpsman with 20- to 30-man Vietnamese Popular Force platoons, for local village security. Here a marine and a corpsman (wearing a USMC "cover," and carrying an M18 smoke grenade) discuss their patrol plan. The PF soldier at left, armed with an M2 carbine, carries a bandoleer of 37mm signal flares, and an AN-M8 pyrotechnic pistol in a special canvas holster on his left front. (US Marine Corps History Division)

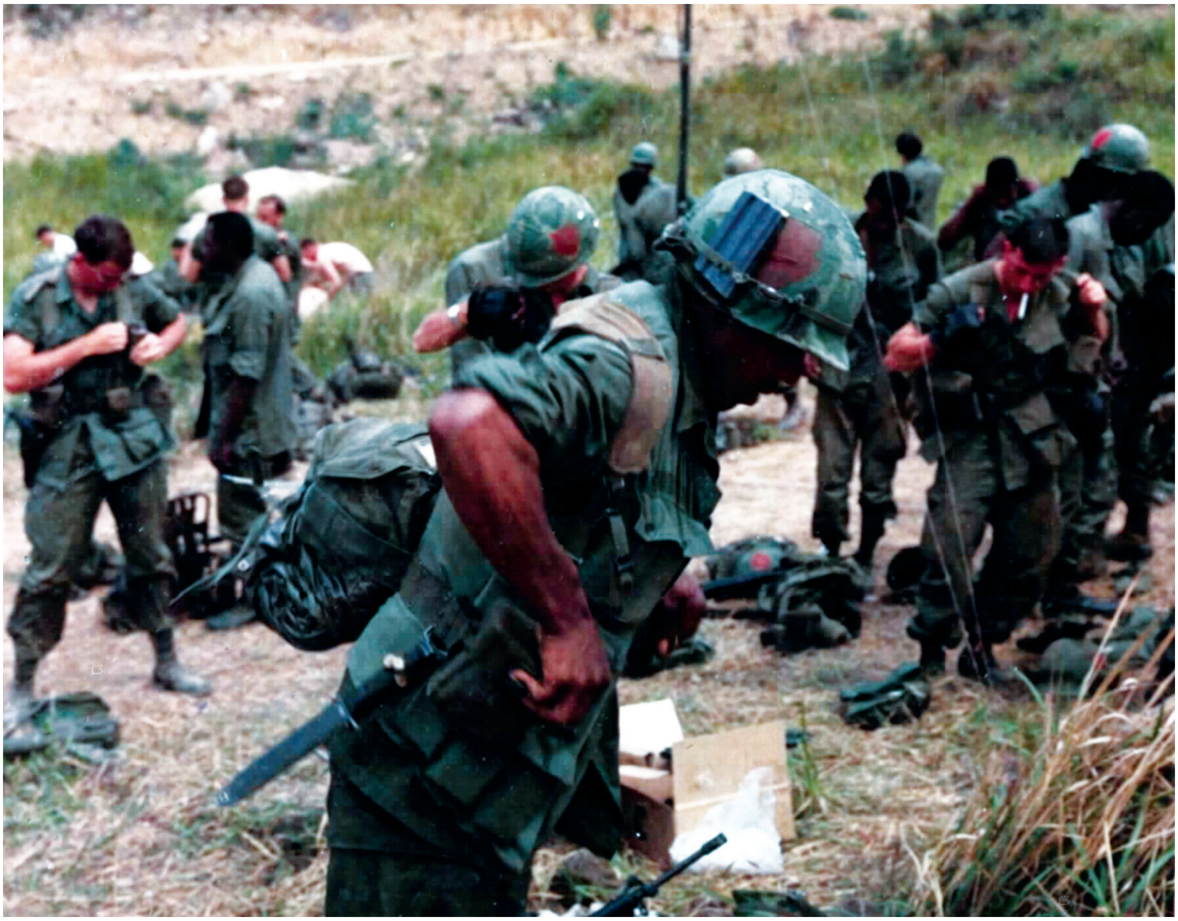




Popular Force troops, whose uniforms include OD, camouflage, and black outfits, assemble VC suspects. The black-clad M79 grenadier at right center has an M1937 BAR belt, which could hold four 40mm rounds in each of its six pockets. Most wear M1956 suspenders; the man in the OD uniform at left, kicking at a prisoner, is armed with a .45cal M3A1 "grease gun." (US Marine Corps History Division)

The **CIDG or "indig" rucksack** (pronounced "sidge" and "indidge") was developed by the CISO based on an NVA design. It cost US$2.80, and was made on Okinawa. It consisted of a main compartment closed with a plastic drawstring and large flap, and three external pockets. The unpadded shoulder straps were crude and attached to buckles by knotting the ends, and a little-used map pocket was positioned against the wearer's back. Most were made of greenish-gray stiff waterproofed fabric with OD straps and edge-binding, but some of OD duck. They were used by USSF personnel, and saw some use by US LRRP companies and other reconnaissance units lacking US rucksacks.

The **ARVN or "ranger" rucksack** (8465-782-3133) was developed by Natick Laboratories in 1963 to replace the M1945 combat field pack, which carried an inadequate load and was too heavy. Thai-made prototype rucksacks with rattan frames were tested by the ARVN Airborne and Marine brigades, but they were called "ranger rucks," since they were initially seen carried by ARVN Rangers. The rattan frame was unacceptable, and a dark OD X-back frame was used in the production run. The ARVN ruck was made of non-waterproof OD duck, with a large main compartment secured by a drawstring and large flap, two large external pockets, an e-tool tab on large flap, and equipment fastening loops on the sides. It was widely used



Men of 1st Bn/508th Infantry, 3rd Bde, 82nd Abn Div load out for a patrol. The red splotch seen on some of the helmet covers is a painted devil's face representative of the 508th Infantry, the "Red Devils." The foreground soldier has a poncho liner rolled up in the poncho strapped under his butt pack. Note the M7 bayonet in an M8 scabbard. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

by RVN forces. Radio operators carried their AN/PRC-25 inside the CIDG and ARVN rucksacks. Although designed for small-framed soldiers they were frequently used by US troops, especially LRRPs, who traded for them or acquired them through the supply system.

The **1qt plastic canteen** was made in both the US and RVN with the "water only and avoid heat" warning translated: "CHI DE DUNG NUOC/ TRANH NGON LUA VA VI LO NONG" (diacritical marks not included here – see Plate H6b).

A low-cost **M3A1 "grease gun" magazine carrier** saw use by the ARVN and National Police (a paramilitary security force working closely with the ARVN). It had four pockets for 30-rd magazines, under a single flap secured by two snaps; usually worn on the chest, it had both neck and waist straps.

Shelter items

The US-made lightweight ARVN poncho was similar in design and materials to the US type, but measured 60in x 82 in. The "indig poncho" was of the same style, but made of a light gray-green vinyl-coated fabric, and measured 43in x 72in; it had four snaps on each long side. It possessed a hood, but this was often cut out and the camp tailor sewed an oval patch over the opening; this proved more effective as a rain-fly, though in practice this poncho was seldom worn as a rain garment. Cords or strings 3–6ft long were tied in buttonhole slits at the corners and midway on the sides and ends, allowing it to be rigged low over a hammock. The 49in x 75in "indig poncho liner" was made of light gray-green nylon with polyester batting. (In practice, the dimensions of indig ponchos and liners varied.)

Hammocks were the customary bedding for indigenous civilians, and the "indig hammock" was a 32in x 70–72in dark OD nylon panel with tunnel seams on both ends. Ropes or cords including 550 cord were threaded through the tunnels as suspension lines; spreader bars (sticks) were not used. It seems that this hammock was also issued to the ARVN, and is sometimes misidentified as a "groundsheet." USSF personnel had one end tunnel cut off and an 18–24in length of the end from another hammock sewed on to accommodate their height. Dead and wounded were carried out in hammocks slung from 10ft or longer poles.

The "indig sleeping bag" measured 34in x 65in, and was made of OD vinyl-coated nylon lined with brown, tan, or gray felt. The right edge and foot end were secured by eight or nine, and three or four snaps, respectively. It was issued in northern mountainous areas, and a poncho liner could be inserted for increased warmth.

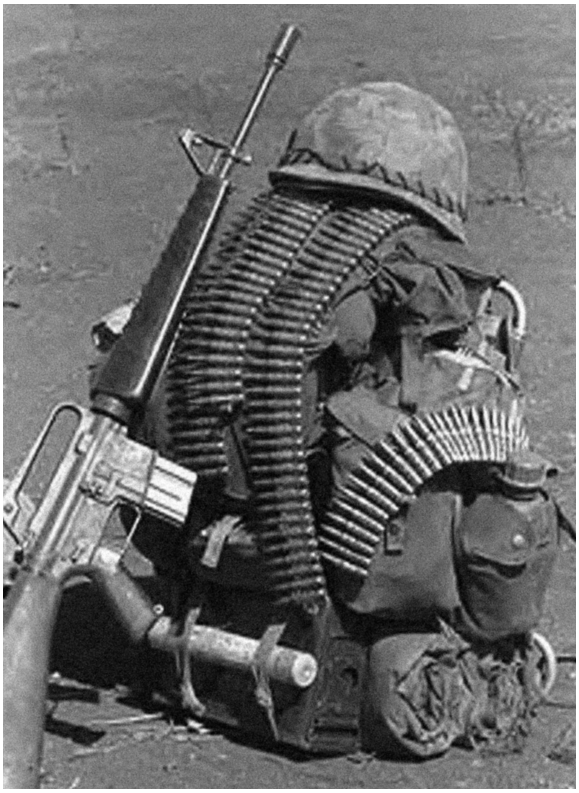
LOAD-OUT: WHAT SOLDIERS ACTUALLY CARRIED

In Vietnam, infantrymen carried a greater load than in any other regions except for the arctic, and much of this was bulky, a factor as important as weight. It was necessary to carry everything – ammunition, water, rations, and unit equipment – required for the 3–6 days between resupply ("resup" or "log day") or until mission completion. Service support troops in the many bases across the country followed "by-the-book" configuration of web gear, but "grunts humping rucks in the boonies" rigged theirs very differently. In most units, how they configured equipment and carried necessities was left up to individuals; units might prescribe SOPs, but these had little bearing on reality. There were instances of green lieutenants slavishly insisting that their platoons carry what was prescribed in "the book" (FM 21-15 – see Select Bibliography). Examples included heavy and bulky shelter halves with poles and pins – totally impractical in the boonies or a firebase. Another was mess kits and utensils, completely unnecessary for heated or cold C-rations – which were eaten from the can with a plastic spoon – or in firebases, where paper plates and cups and plastic utensils were provided for sanitation reasons.

The infantryman's load

The issue of rucksacks caused major changes in what, how, and how much infantrymen carried.

This soldier's basic load is constructed around the nylon rucksack attached to the aluminum frame. A 100-rd belt of M60 ammo is draped over the ruck (every fifth round being orange-tipped tracer). Below the ruck is a bedroll, probably with an air mattress inside a poncho liner and poncho. Behind this, a white pyrotechnic signal ("pop-up") is strapped to an M19A1 "NATO ammo can," which might contain two 100-rd M60 belts in M4 bandoleers, or might simply be used to keep personal items dry and clean. The black plastic muzzle protector on the M16A1 could be fired through if necessary. (US Army)



The lightweight and tropical rucksacks' frames extended down over the waist belt, preventing the butt pack, canteens, and other equipment from being attached to the belt's back. E-tools were attached to the rucksack, as were machetes, canteens, and smoke grenades. The belt was limited to ammunition and first aid pouches, and one or two canteens attached awkwardly at the sides. This was especially a problem for small-waisted men. Many troops eliminated the belt and suspenders altogether and carried *everything* in and on the rucksack, often haphazardly. Some even deleted the rucksack itself, simply strapping gear to the frame. However, the butt pack still saw use for short patrols, and by mechanized infantrymen and riverine troops who were separated from their APCs and river craft for short intervals.

Troops tended to adjust the belt longer than their waist size to reduce chafing, but if too loose it caused belt equipment to bounce when moving. Since it was supported by suspenders it was common for the belt to be worn unfastened to hang comfortably loose; if running, the buckle could be fastened. Some troops made a 5–6in loop of 550 cord fastened by a cow-hitch knot passed through the buckle's slot end and hitched around the T-hook; this kept the belt from hanging too widely open, and reduced bouncing.

Seven to nine magazines were inadequate; 18–24 were the usual load, along with 2–4 "frag" grenades. Men carried two to three bandoleers each

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ARVN & INDIGENOUS EQUIPMENT

When armed with M16 rifles and M79 grenade launchers, ARVN, ROK, Thai, and Philippine troops used M1956 gear. The ARVN and early arriving ROK troops armed with M1 rifles, M1/M2 carbines, and BARs were equipped with US WW II/KW gear. In some instances M1956 and WW II/KW items were mixed, being partly compatible.

(1a) The M1945 combat field pack without X-back combat and cargo field pack suspenders, and **(1b)** with them. Most equipment items typically attached externally to these packs have been omitted to show them unobscured, but a rice-straw sleeping mat is carried rolled under the flap.

(2) From 1964 the M1945 packs were replaced with the ARVN rucksack. An issue 2qt cook pot is attached to this "ranger rucksack."

(3) The CIDG or "indig" rucksack was also developed in 1963, based on an NVA design. ARVN and indig rucks saw some use by US LRRPs and MACV-SOG; since they looked similar to NVA rucks from a distance, it was hoped to deceive the enemy as to the identity of a fleetingly seen recon team. For a 1qt canteen to fit into one of an indig rucksack's side pockets a 1½in slit had to be cut in the opening's top edge; the pockets were actually designed so a canteen would *not* fit, reserving them for other items. Vietnamese rations in paper or plastic bags included pre-cooked or dried rice, fresh vegetables, and dried salted fish; canned sardines, pork or chicken; hot peppers, and *nuoc mam* (fermented fish sauce); and the occasional live chicken or duck tied to a ruck. Rucks held rations, poncho, hammock, and a thin cotton blanket or, rarely, a poncho liner.

(4) An ARVN soldier armed with an M1 rifle was equipped with an M1923 cartridge belt (ten pockets = 80 rds); M1910 canteen cover with 1qt metal canteen; M1942 first aid pouch; and combat and cargo field pack suspenders, often with 8-rd M1 rifle clips slipped on. A pocketknife hangs from a grenade arming ring held by the snap of one clip pocket. Many ARVN soldiers carried numerous grenades of mixed types, sometimes up to eight on belts and suspenders.

(5) A common practice was wrapping the hammock, blanket, and possessions into a flat, square bundle covered with a poncho and tied to the suspenders at the back.

(6) The M1936 pistol belt was issued to troops armed with a carbine, SMG, or pistol. Attached to the belt are an M2 carbine magazine pocket for four 30-rd "banana" magazines; a plastic canteen; a first aid pouch; and an old M1 rifle-or-carbine cartridge pocket. A sheet of plastic is folded over the back of the belt as a rain cape or groundsheet and held in place with string.

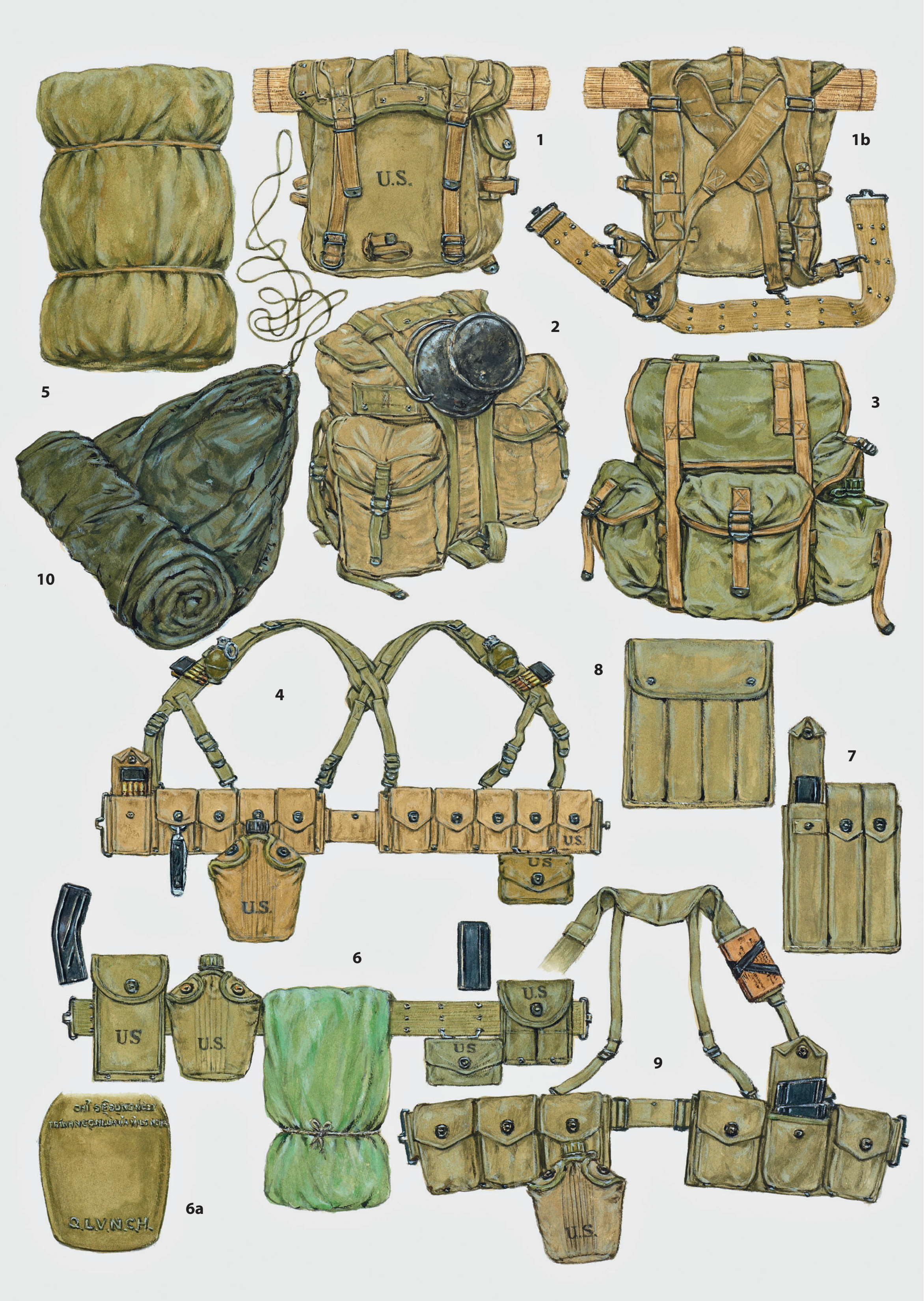
(6a) Typically only one or two plastic canteens were carried, since the Vietnamese needed relatively less water than Americans. The "water only and avoid heat" warning is translated on the canteen, along with the ARVN's "Q.L.V.N.C.H." marking.

(7) The three-pocket SMG magazine carrier held three 30-rd magazines for the M1, M1A1, or M3A1 submachine guns.

(8) This RVN-made four-pocket magazine carrier for M3A1 SMG magazines was used by the ARVN and National Police.

(9) The M1937 BAR magazine belt held up to 12x 20-rd magazines, but usually fewer, with one or two pockets used for cleaning gear and personal items. M1956 suspenders are attached, to which a field dressing is taped rather than carried in a pouch; they were also taped to belts and rifle slings.

(10) This partly unrolled "indig hammock" shows its suspension cord, here doubled 550 cord.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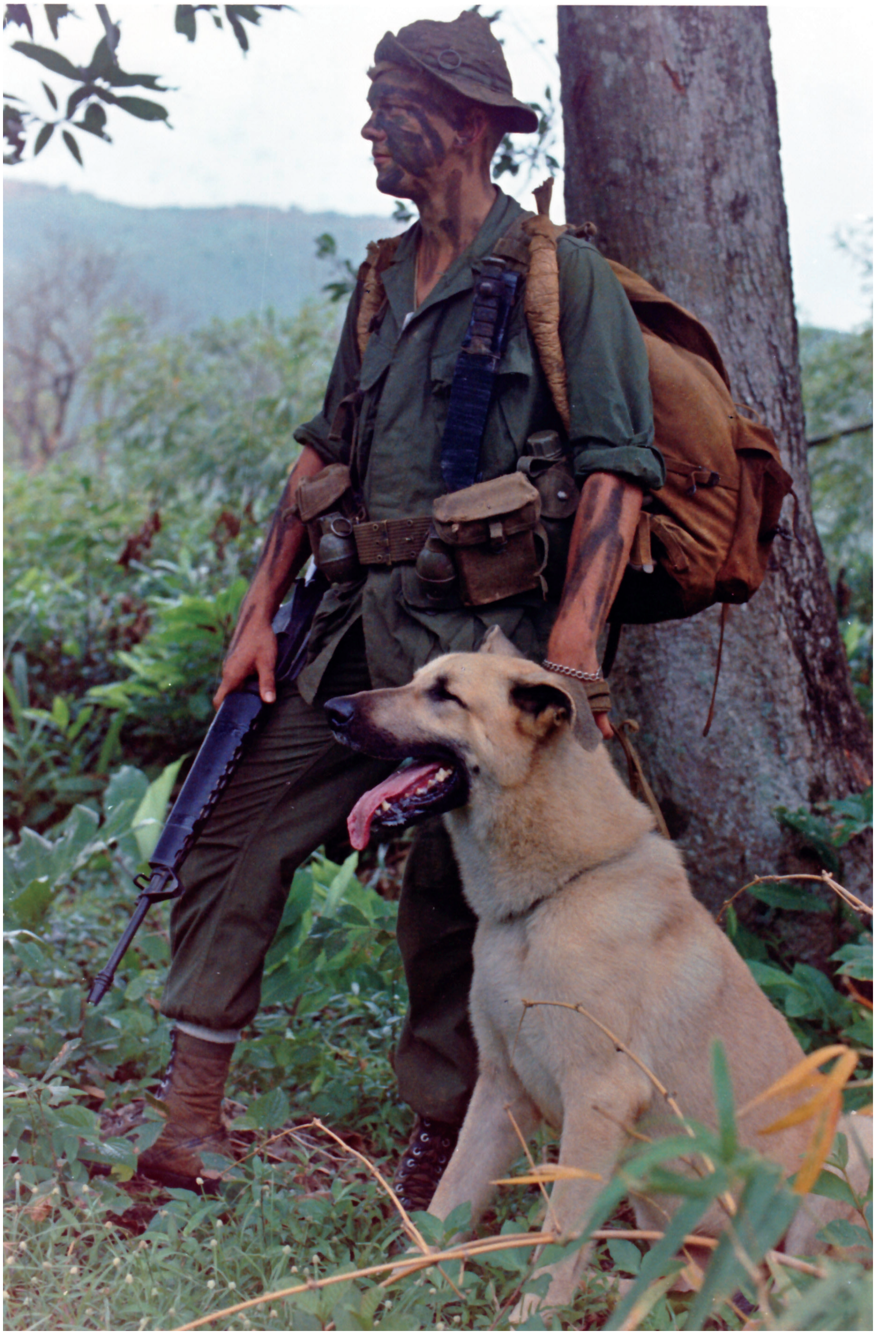


A scout dog handler carries basic M1956 gear with M26 fragmentation "lemon grenades" on the ammo pouches. He is "camied up" using loam-colored (dark green) wax face paint. On his back is the ARVN rucksack sometimes acquired by Americans; note the crude shoulder-strap padding held in place by wrapped adhesive tape (originally white, but stained reddish-brown by the caliche soil.) A dog handler's equipment included a chain choke collar or leather collar, and a 5ft leather leash. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

with 7x M16 magazines or clipped ammunition; one was usually tied around the waist, one or two slung across the chest "bandit-style," and at least one hung on the rucksack. Compared to brick-like pouches the bandoleers reduced the likelihood of groin injuries when hitting the ground, and made it easier to low-crawl; they wore out quickly, but were replaced with the next ammunition resupply. The 20-rd and 30-rd magazines were loaded with two or three fewer rounds to reduce follower-spring stress.

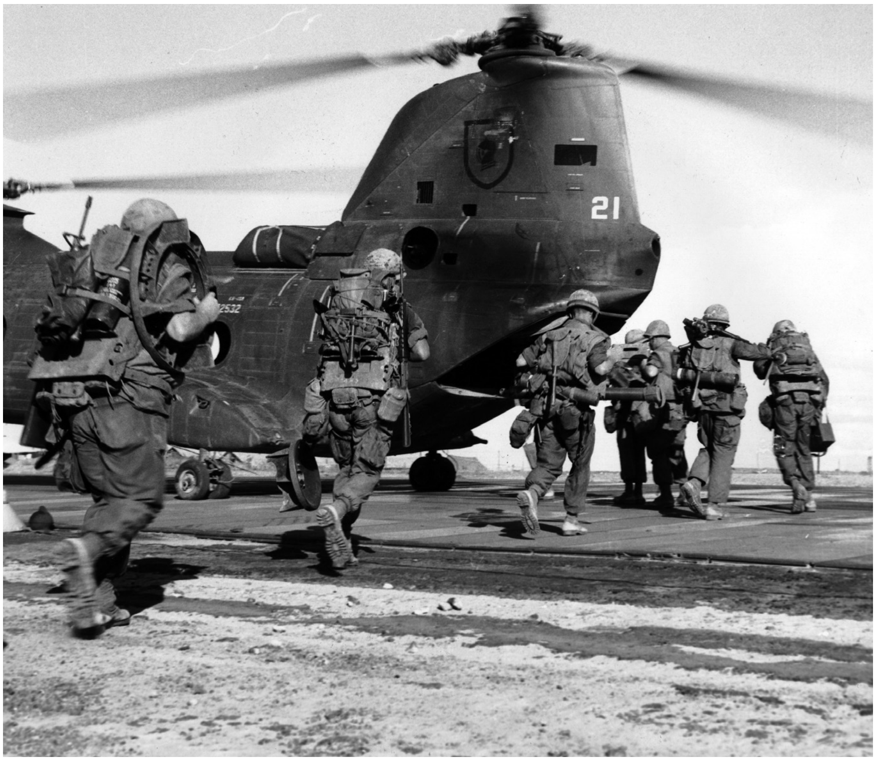
Besides individual ammunition, soldiers also carried platoon munitions: a bandoleer of either M60 or M79 rounds, a Claymore mine, LAW, smoke

Marines, one of them wearing an ARVN rucksack, treat a head wound suffered by a member of an M60 machine gun crew (the MG can be seen in the background, on an M122 tripod). A machine gun squad, typically attached to each rifle platoon, officially consisted of a sergeant squad leader and two six-man gun teams – though in practice they usually had only two or three men. There were three squads in the machine gun section organic to the rifle company's weapons platoon. (US Marine Corps History Division)

grenades, "pop-up" flares, or trip flares – though an individual naturally would not carry all of these. A man armed with an M203 grenade launcher reported carrying 40 rds of 40mm, 11x M16A1 magazines, 3x grenades, a trip flare, and a smoke grenade. A sniper armed with a 7.62mm XM21 carried ten magazines: one in the rifle, four in two pouches, and five in a 2qt canteen cover. Most men in a squad might carry a roughly 60-rd length of M60 belt hung over their shoulders, sometimes protected from rain and mud with a rubber tube cut from a damaged air mattress. Slung belts were carried with bullet-points outwards so as not to gouge the neck, and it was recommended that magazines be inserted in pouches with the bullets pointing away from the body, to avoid an incoming round hitting a magazine and driving them into the body. A 60mm or 81mm mortar round might be carried by each man, to be dropped off at a mortar position.

Weapon slings were often removed. The conspicuously black M16's shape was sometimes distorted by applying strips and patches of OD or true green duct or gaffer tape – "hundred-mile-an-hour tape," also good for repairing web gear. Sometimes equipment buckles and hooks were secured with black plastic electrical or fabric friction tape, which also reduced metallic noises.

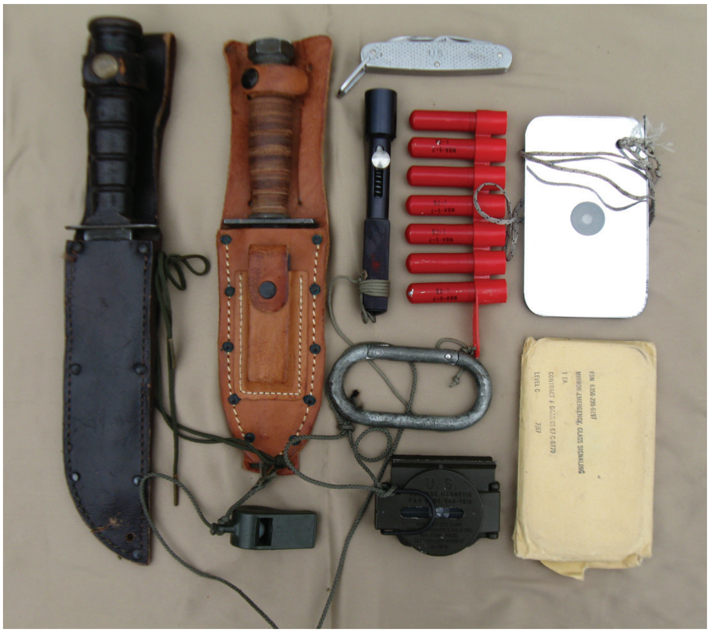
Water was essential in the heat, and 4–6x 1qt canteens were routinely carried – or even more, during the dry season in areas with few ground-water sources. Canteens were attached to rucksack equipment loops, inserted in the side pockets, or simply hung without covers by the plastic cap straps, sometimes with multiple canteens clipped together by a "snaplink" (carabiner – FSN 8465-360-0228). Two-quart canteens were unpopular, being awkward to carry. Canteens were to be filled with water only, to prevent an aftertaste, but pre-sweetened Kool-Aid sent from home cut the taste of iodine-purified



Plywood packboards were extensively used by 60mm and 81mm mortar squads; here an 81mm squad rushes to board a CH-46D Sea Knight helicopter. Marine infantry battalion headquarters and service companies had a platoon of eight 81mm M29 mortars; most remained in firebases for defense, but a couple were sometimes taken into the field, or helicoptered in if needed. The man on the left carries the outer ring assembly of the two-part M23A3 base plate. (US Marine Corps History Division)

water. (Commercially bottled water, today a military staple, was neither issued nor then in wide civilian use.)

With resups roughly every three days, in theory nine individual combat meals (MCI or "C-rats") were drawn. Due to the heat, many men had the appetite for only one or two meals per day, but kept one or two in reserve in case weather or aviation mission requirements caused resupply delays. C-rations were "broken down," i.e. removed from their cartons and packing materials, and unwanted items were traded or discarded to reduce weight and bulk. A common practice to reduce rattling was to put 3–6 C-rat cans in socks ("chow socks"), placed in or hung from rucksacks. LRRP rations were lighter but still bulky, and had to be left in their bags to prevent the dehydrated rations getting wet. Most men carried a plastic bag with leftover C-rat condiments, toilet paper, jam and peanut butter cans, Tabasco sauce, etc. A "major resup" arrived every sixth day, often with hot meals in insulated M1944 Mermite containers, and sometimes with a change of uniform. Ration and ammunition packaging residue was



Selection of items of particular use to reconnaissance teams (see Plate G). (Left to right) Marine Mk 2 Ka-Bar fighting knife; Air Force survival knife, above a plastic "Thunderer" whistle; (top center) general purpose pocket knife ("demo" or "engineer's" knife), above an M186 Gyro Jet "pen flare gun" with bandoleer of seven red flares; carabiner ("snap link"); and lensatic compass. (Right) Mk 3 air/ground signal mirror, with package below it. Attaching items with retaining or "dummy" cords was common practice. (Trey Moore Collection)

Collecting Vietnam War combat equipments

Authentic Vietnam War equipment items are relatively inexpensive, and there are virtually no commercial reproductions on the market. However, authentic items are now 40–55 years old, and are becoming scarcer. With age, cotton web gear "tightens up" to become stiffer and may shrink slightly, making it difficult to manipulate (e.g. to insert magazines in pouches). Sunlight and heat degrades nylon and, to a lesser degree, cotton items. Vinyl-coated fabric must also be protected to prevent cracking and deterioration. Cotton items should be inspected regularly; if they show the slightest signs or smell of mildew, this should be soft-brushed off, and the item exposed inside and out to direct sunlight for a few hours. Gear should only be stored in temperature- and humidity-controlled environments, to preserve it for future generations.

supposed to be carried by the troops until evacuated by "resup choppers," but often they buried it or tossed it (to be scavenged by the VC).

Some men carried a spare AN/PRC-25 or -77 battery, since the platoon radio used up 1–4 "bats" a day. The radio with battery, handset, accessories, and harness weighed 24lb 11oz. Leaders carried maps (covered with "sticky acetate," or in plastic bags) in a trousers cargo pocket; a lensatic compass (6605-846-7618); binoculars (6x30 M13A1, or 7x50 M15A1, M16, & M17A1); a flashlight; a notepad (7510-281-2691); Signal Operating Instructions (SOI, a classified booklet containing daily frequencies, callsigns, authentication table, message formats, and alpha and brevity codes); and air/ground marker aids (signal mirror, strobe light, pen flare gun, marker panel). While a compass (first aid) case was available, most carried their compass in a breast pocket secured to a buttonhole by a "dummy cord;" if the web gear was lost, the compass was retained. A carabiner was often clipped to a suspender loop.

Spare clothing carried was minimal: a couple of pairs of socks, a boonie hat, and in the highlands a sleeping sweater and/or rain jacket. Underwear was seldom worn, much less spares carried. A "drive-on rag" was essential for mopping sweat and padding shoulders: either a 37in x 37in x 52in OD muslin triangular bandage (6510-201-1755), a 20in x 40in OG-107 bath towel, or a 24in x 36in OG-109 knitted cotton neckerchief (8440-935-6374). Toilet articles in a variety of containers included razor, toothbrush, toothpaste, soap in a plastic box, mirror, hand towel, sunburn paste, chap-stick, foot powder, malaria tablets, etc. Insect repellent was usually kept in a pocket or under the helmet band. Toilet articles, cigarettes, letter-writing materials, a cheap Kodak Instamatic camera, and other items needing to be kept dry were often packed in robust M2A1 or M19A1 ammo cans, which had firmly latched lids sealed with rubber gaskets. Zip-lock plastic bags were then in their infancy, but plastic bags were available from the packaging of radio batteries, medical supplies, etc.

Sleeping gear included a poncho, poncho liner, air mattress, and sometimes a mosquito net. Each man might carry these items, or they might be split between two men, since one man might be sleeping while his buddy was on guard (though both always had ponchos). Two men typically shared an e-tool and rifle cleaning kit.

An important consideration was the medical evacuation ("medevac") of dead, wounded, ill, and injured. Units new to Vietnam learned the hard way that ammunition, water, rations, and critical items were to be recovered from casualties before evacuation; more than one wounded platoon leader was evacuated still carrying the platoon's only map and SOI.

OPPOSITE
The author and his interpreter (left) at Chi Linh SF camp. Both wear M1956 web gear, with "M14" ammo pouches holding M16A1 magazines; field dressings were inserted in the bottom to raise the magazines for easy extraction. The author additionally carried two first aid pouches on his belt as well as others in his "indig ruck;" in all he carried ten dressings, to treat multiple fragmentation wounds suffered by CIDG strikers. A third first aid pouch on the left suspender shoulder strap holds a lensatic compass; this was later removed and the compass carried in a chest pocket. (Author's collection)

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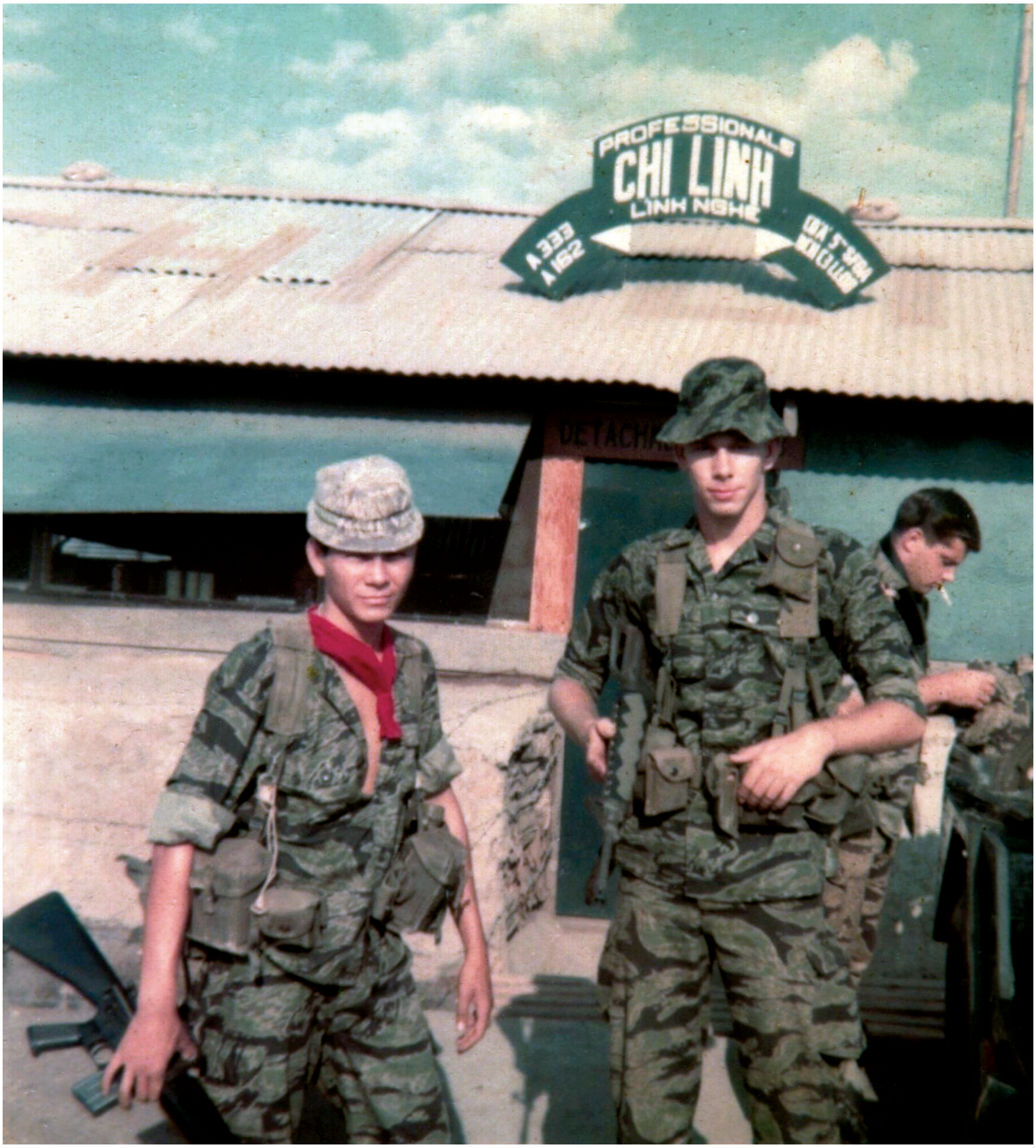
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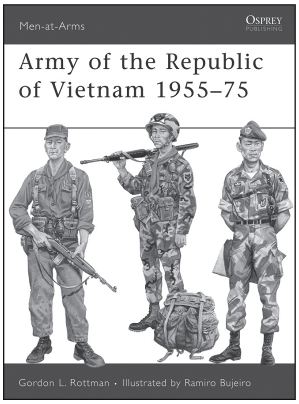
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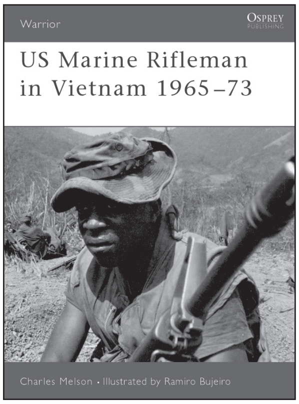
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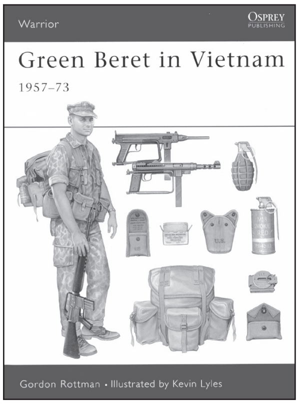
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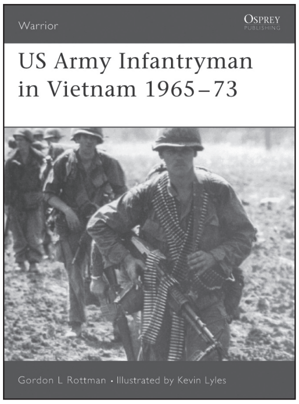
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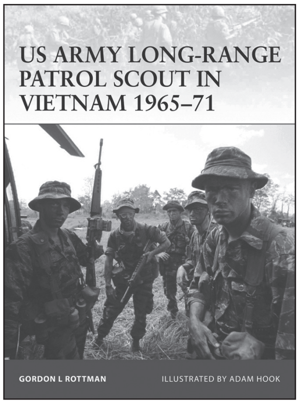
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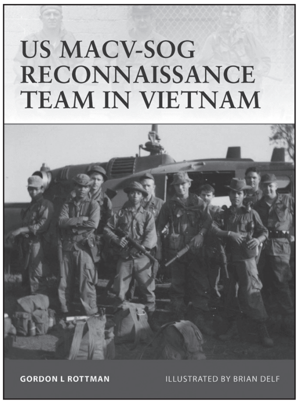
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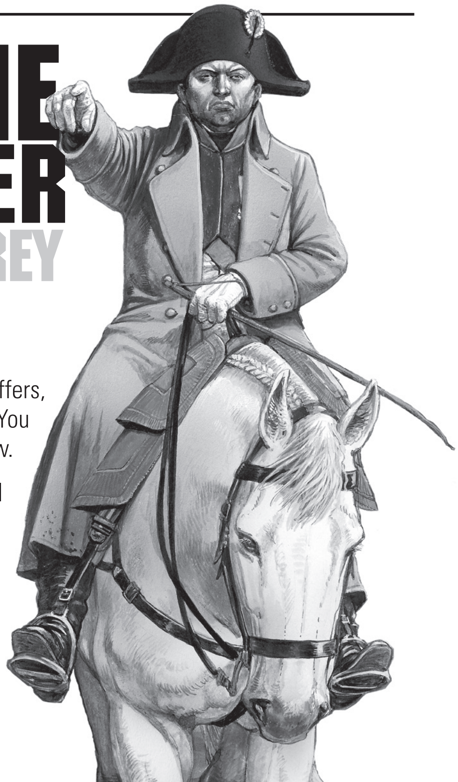

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